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NAS
Hunt

THE CAT

'I had rather be a kitten and cry—Mew!'

SHAKESPEARE.

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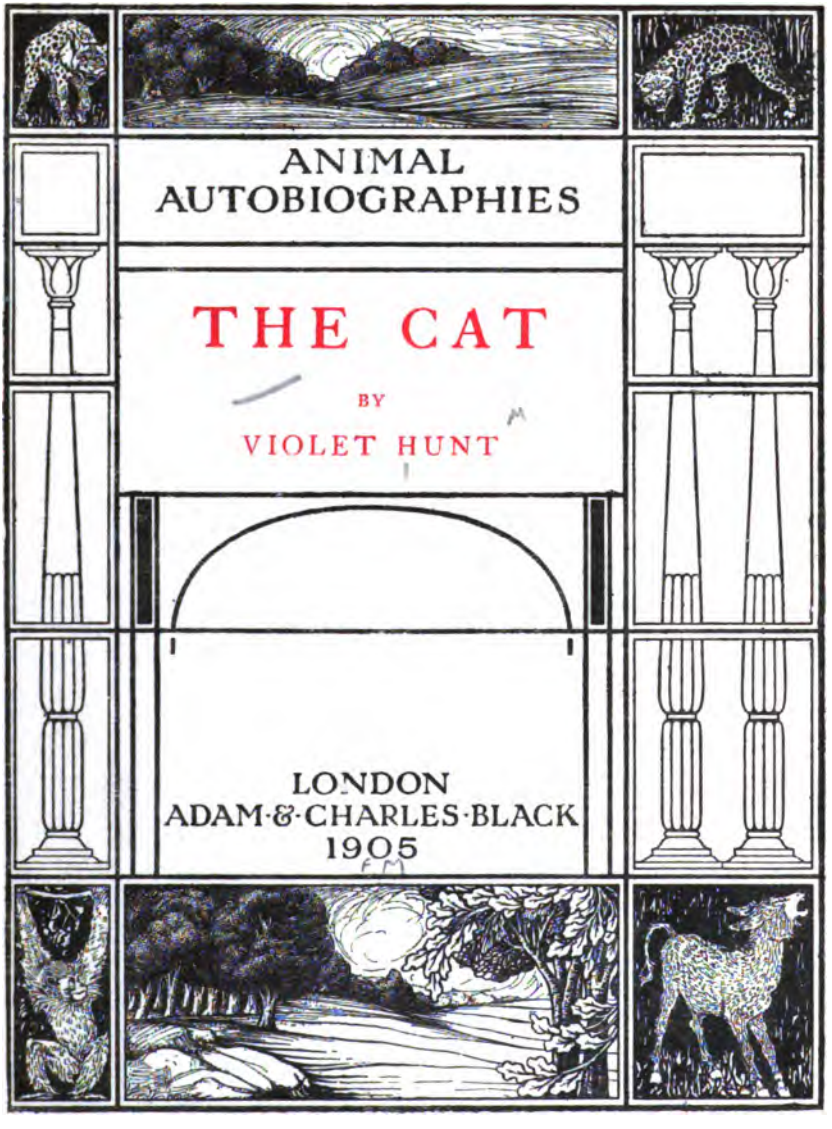
ANIMAL
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES
THE CAT
BY
VIOLET HUNT
LONDON
ADAM·&·CHARLES·BLACK
1905

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TO

ANNE CHILD

PREFACE

A CAT is of all animals the most difficult to know; it is so intimate, but so detached; so dependent on human beings for its comfort, so loftily indifferent to their wishes. It requires one who has lived with cats and seen their idiosyncrasies, their whims and their strong individuality, to write about them, and in the present author they have found a spokeswoman who knows them through and through. A sense of humour is necessary in dealing with the subject—and the humour is not lacking. Loki is a real cat in more senses than one, and those who follow his life story will find themselves better able to understand their own cats than they have ever been before.

THE EDITOR.

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By Adolph Birkenruth

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THE CAT

CHAPTER I

THE NURSERY

I FIRST saw the light—at least I did not exactly see the light, for I was blind, so they tell me, for about a week after I was born—on the twenty-third of April 19—. There were five of us, three boys and two girls. Our mother was a pure-blooded Persian; so was our father, and it was, I believe, considered by Them a very good match. They arrange all our matches for us in this country, and indeed manage most of our affairs, but then it must be remembered that we are strangers, as the title Persian denotes. Moreover, we belong to that division of the race that is called 'Blue Smokes,' which means, not that our fur is blue, for that would be ugly and loud, but that if you

part it and look carefully at the roots you will see that it is exactly the shade of blue that smoke is when you get a lot of it together. Papa's name is 'Blue Boy II.,' and he is excessively handsome, and has taken prizes at cat-shows all over the country. His mistress, Miss Goddard, who lives at West Dulwich, is always travelling about with him to show him, and mother is very proud of that.

The first sound that I heard—for I wasn't born deaf as well as blind—was the voice of Rosamond, a little girl who lives in our house sometimes, screeching at the top of her voice, 'Oh, Auntie, Auntie May! Petronilla has got her kittens! Hooray! Hooray!'

My mistress came running upstairs two steps at a time, and put her foot through her dress—I heard it rip. Then she leaned over us, for I felt her breath on my face, and said in a voice quite gurgly with pleasure, 'Brava, Petronilla!'

Then another voice—I learnt afterwards that it was the voice of the parlour-maid, a good soul and as fond of cats as Auntie May—said, 'They look just like so many grey boiled rags, don't they, Miss?'

'Oh, p-p-please, Auntie May,' began Rosa-

mond, stuttering in her eagerness, 'mayn't I take one out to look at it?'

'Certainly not. How dare you propose such a thing! Go and do your health exercises. Petronilla is to be left entirely alone and not bothered.'

'Quite right, Miss Rosamond!' said Mary; 'I've heard say that if you watch her she'll do them a mischief. I knew a cat what ate all her kittens——'

'Ssh, Mary, I am sure Petronilla would not do such a thing. She isn't a common cat. But I tell you what she will certainly do if she thinks we are going to touch them or take them away from her—she will hide them. She knows it isn't good for them to be handled. You have no idea of the amount cats know, and though Petronilla is only four years old, she knows as much as the best nurse ever did. Now be off, all of you, and leave her alone!'

All very well, but Mary the maid simply couldn't keep away, and about three days after this she came in to dust the room (although she had been forbidden to do that just yet, for fear of blowing the germy dust into our eyes and down our throats); and when she had done dusting, she bent down and took us all out one by one, and examined

us till she was sure to know us again. Mother looked at her reproachfully, but did not lift a paw to her, for she knew Mary was a dear good creature, and, though silly, would sacrifice her life for a single grey hair off mother's head, or indeed a hair of anywhere off her, and she once said so. But when Mary had gone she took a decided line, and said that she was determined to make an end of all this fingering and pawing of young limbs, which would certainly prevent them from growing and developing properly.

There was a large press with low flat shelves in a corner of the room, full of Auntie May's clothes, that just suited her purpose. She took us all up, one by one, carefully, in her mouth, keeping her teeth back somehow or other not to hurt us, though she could not help making us most disagreeably wet, and carried us along to the cupboard, bumping us as little as she could help on the floor, but still she did bump us. Then with one of us in her mouth, she jumped up to the shelf she had chosen—having first opened the folding doors of the cupboard with her paws—and laid him or her carefully down in the corner, and so with us all.

When Auntie May came up to find her clothes

for going out, she discovered us. Mother purred at once to disarm her, for it was known that Auntie May could not manage to be really cross with dear Pet for long, IF she purred.

'Oh, you *beast*—darling, I mean! Right on the top of my best white wuffy hat! Come out of it at once, angel—pet! And here is another on my ermine boa! And another on my best painted *crèpe de chine* blouse! Oh, this is too much, Petronilla, my lamb——'

And she took us all out quite gently, not hurting us half so much as mother did in bumping us along the floor, and put us back into our bed of fresh hay, that we have to lie in so as to make us smell sweet. Auntie May always says that very young infant kittens are like babies, and need beautiful accessories, such as blue bows, and green hay, and white powder puffs.

They fastened the wardrobe door very tight and strictly forbade Mary to touch us, and for many days after this we just lay still and ate—ate—ate! Mother, however greedy we were, never pushed us away. She was like a soft hill of wool that we had leave to lie up against and browse upon. Every now and then she spread out her paws, which were like silver streaks, wide and square,

all over us, not heavily, so as to weigh us down, but lightly, like a sort of lattice that kept the cold draughts off us, and that we might fancy to be a wall or a hedge between us and the world if we liked.

It was the great advantage of mother's being a pet cat that she and her family lived in the house, not in a cattery, as they are called. Mother knew very well what a cattery was like—she had been in one before a man bought her and gave her to Auntie May as a present. She cost three guineas, she said. It was a very nice cattery, as catteries go—she admits that—and she will always look upon it with affection as being her first home, but still there was a lot of difference between it and Auntie May's house. A cattery has generally hard trodden-in earth for a floor, without a carpet, except for a few unhemmed bits spread here and there. There's generally an old chair—wooden—to scrape your claws on: now velvet, such as is kept here, mother says, is much more interesting and efficacious. The bed is inside, under cover—I grant you that—but only made out of a few old packing cases, and there is generally a horrid smelly oil-lamp to warm the whole place. Now Auntie May had us in her own bedroom for the first week of our lives, and when she did move us, it was

only into her study. She was an authoress and had to have a study; at least her father, who was a distinguished painter and R.A., and adores his daughter, thought she had as much right as he to have a studio—same word as study. 'She sells her books, and I don't sell my pictures!' he said. (I call her Auntie May because Rosamond does, and because it sounds more respectful, and mother said I ought.) Her study was quite nicely furnished and full of bureaus and manuscript cupboards and high things to perch on. Mother says it is advisable when choosing a perch to get as high as possible, because of the draughts that run along the floors of even the best rooms.

Mother told us many things as we lay there, but I can't say I took much notice of them till my eyes opened. It was just a nice sleepy sound she made that sent us off to bye-bye one after another. I suppose she slept herself, but I never remember being awake when she wasn't. She was a very good mother; she hardly ever left us. Of course she got out of the bed to eat her meals; she detested crumbs in the bed, and so on. If she went away she always came back with a kind sort of speech—Rosamond called it a mew—something like 'Here we are again!' or 'Well, how goes it,

infants?' and then lay down right on the top of us. Rosamond used to scold her and pull her off us, thinking she would hurt us; she didn't know that we were always able to ooze away from under mother quite easily when once she had turned round three times and got settled.

Till my eyes opened I did not know how many brothers and sisters I had, except for mother's telling me. I fought them all without having the slightest idea of the sort of thing I was fighting. I knew it had claws, though. I knew that Fred B. Nicholson, as they called him afterwards, after Auntie May's American cousin, was a regular bully from the beginning, always putting himself forward, and shoving us away from the best places. After all, eating is everything in those first days, and mother was singularly weak where Fred was concerned, and let him batter us as much as he liked, and never took our side against him. She only said 'First come, first served!' and 'Heaven helps those that help themselves!' and certainly he did grow a great strong boy.

Perhaps that was the reason why his eyes opened first!

Rosamond gave us a great deal of attention when her own lessons were over, and before, and

hung over us till she got all the blood to her head, she said. She called herself cat-maid. One day when she was leaning over our bed, she suddenly jumped up and screamed:

'Oh, Auntie May, one of them—I don't even know which, but I think it is Fred B. Nicholson—has got a tiny, tiny slit where his eyes ought to be! Do you suppose he can see?'

I felt the first grief of my life. I *knew* there was no slit where *my* eyes ought to be, and I felt sure it *was*, as Rosamond guessed, that horrid boy Fred, who always got first in everything. Next day the slit in his face was bigger. That evening they said with certainty, 'Yes, Fred can see!' In the daylight Rosamond discovered that his eyes were blue. By that time *I* saw what looked like a streak of light, and guessed that my eyes were going to open soon, and wondered if they would be blue too! I asked mother, and she laughed at Rosamond and at me, saying that all kittens' eyes are blue at first. Even Rosamond ought to have known that. The question was, would they be green or orange afterwards?

'I should be very sorry,' mother said, 'if any of you turned out to have green eyes. That would defeat all poor Auntie May's plans. I have green

eyes myself, alas! and she is most good to overlook it in me, but your father has the most beautiful golden eyes in the world, or in any cat-show, and let us hope that you will have the luck to take after him!'

Fred began, the others followed. My eyes were the last to open. I suppose I had caught cold; I am sure I was not delicate. They took warm milk and mopped the place where the eyes ought to be. Mother licked me. They raced to cure me. Mother always said that she backed her licking, but I fancy the warm milk did it, myself. And pretty soon I saw. We all saw, and so when we quarrelled we managed to aim better.

I really saw very little besides untidy spiky bits of hay sticking up all round me, and beyond that, a wall of wicker. I sometimes saw great moonfaces bending over me, and Rosamond's long golden fur tickled me as she put her head right into the basket. *She* had blue eyes, but then she was still a child. I wondered if they would be green or orange when she grew up? Auntie May's were brown, shot with green; she had quite dark fur too, and tied up, not hanging down like Rosamond's.

If I chose to keep my eyes *inside* the basket, I

saw my mother's green eyes, and they were so pretty and mournful. Auntie May used to call them Burne-Jones eyes. She meant it as a compliment, and mother always purred. She loved being praised.

Though Freddy's eyes were open, he could not scratch himself with his hind leg without falling over, and I could. Then I found that *I* could do something else Freddy could not, that is, make a queer rolling, rumbling, useless sound in my throat. I don't see much good in it myself, but it gives Them pleasure. They take it as if we were saying 'Thank you' when we are given food or stroked. But no one, not even the vet,—that is the cat doctor—know how it is done. I heard him say so. I have not the slightest idea how I do it. I just listened to mother, and brooded over the thought for days, and all of a sudden I woke up, as Rosamond was tickling my stomach, and found myself r-r-ring away somewhere inside me like anything! Mother even started when she heard me; I am not sure she was altogether glad.

'Poor child!' she said, 'he is taking up his burden early. They mostly don't expect recognition from us until we are older. Don't, don't purr

too easily, my son; be chary of your gift: it is wiser.' But Rosamond buried her face in me and mother, so as to hear better, and presently she raised it and called out to Auntie May, who was sitting writing at her little table:

'Oh, Auntie May'—(all her sentences began like that)—'this kitten, who was so late with his eyes, is at any rate the first to purr! Purr, darling, purr!'

I purred till my throat was sore, and she stroked my back and tickled my stomach till I had to curl up and bring my hind legs and my head together. They think you do it because you like being tickled, not because you can't help it. I purred so much that day that I had to take a rest the next, and then They said I was sulky!

And Freddy was jealous. He could not purr, though he *could* spit. Mother reproves him, for she says that spitting, though a useful weapon and a protection against intrusive aliens, is not to be used in private life between cat and cat. It is good for dogs, if I ever see one. Mother uses it but rarely for Them. I asked her why she didn't spit at the people in the house, who, though well-meaning, irritated her by coming and lifting us out and looking us all over, and talking about our

points, and preventing us from growing? She said, 'I don't do it to Them, however annoying they are, because, when all is said and done, I am well bred and Persian.'

I knew mother never said a thing like that without being able to prove it, so I was a little surprised one day at what one of Auntie May's friends said. This man took Fred up and handled him as if he didn't know much about kittens. I watched him. His moonface had a queer little smile much too small for it—a sly smile.

'Touch of Persian about this cat, I should say!' he observed quietly.

'Why, they *are* Persian, Mr. Blake!' Rosamond cried out; but Auntie May said nothing, but simply hoofed him out of her room and ours. His little smile had grown bigger.

After he had gone, mother boiled with rage.

'I won't stand this!' she exclaimed. 'Come along, my traduced darlings, with me, and we will hide you, lest you be again exposed to insolent criticism of that kind. Touch of Persian indeed! Perhaps he thinks Persians haven't claws! Perhaps he thinks we cannot resent injuries adequately! Come, my pure-bred doves! Come, my prize darlings, my pedigree'd angels!'

The door into Auntie May's bedroom next door was left open. Mother carried us in one by one and laid us on the ground under the famous cupboard we had been in before, while she leaned up and, with her paw, turned the handle of the cupboard door. Then she seized me and jumped with me on to the bottom shelf and stowed me in one corner, pulling the clothes and what not that was there all over me, so as to hide me completely. She then left me, recommending me to silence, or I should get 'what for' with her hind feet, and fetched the others one by one. She placed them all on different shelves—I saw her leap past me each time—and stayed herself with Fred, for I did not see her go past again. That was a long jump, for it took her right up to the fifth shelf.

All the afternoon we lay there, mother visiting us all in turn. Unfortunately, she had not been able to succeed in closing the wardrobe door after her. It yawned in the most suspicious manner, and so Auntie May thought when she came back from Pinner, where she had gone to dine and sleep, as soon as Mr. Blake had departed. About eleven o'clock the next morning she came bouncing in in her hat and jacket, and the moment her eye fell on the open door she cried out:

'Oh, my prophetic soul! Come here at once, Rosamond, or you will be sorry!'

She opened the door wider and looked in, but, naturally, could see nothing.

'It *looks* all right!' she said to Rosamond. 'But all the same I feel sure that Petronilla is somewhere inside. Isn't my *crèpe de chine* blouse in that corner rucked up rather suspiciously? Gently! Don't let us spoil poor Petronilla's game of "Hide-and-Seek." We mustn't find them too soon.'

Fred was under the *crèpe de chine* blouse, and they found him. Then they found the other boy, with some artificial violets she wears pinned on to the front of her dress in the evening on top of him. On the top story one of the girls was curled into the crown of a hat, and mother was in the lowest shelf with the other, mixed up with an ermine boa. The play lasted quite ten minutes, and Rosamond was delighted. Very little damage was done; in fact, as mother said, a clean, well-licked-every-day cat, if you don't frighten him and drive him to desperation, rarely spoils clothes, or breaks ornaments, or leaves any trace of his presence. But if you chivy him or make him nervous, he doesn't choose to hold himself

accountable for any harm he may happen to do, naturally!

There were five of us, and, so far, only Fred B. Nicholson had been christened. Rosamond, who is a child who loves putting things into their right places and calling them by their proper names, pointed this out to her Aunt.

'There are certain royalties,' said Auntie May, 'whose religion cannot be chosen till they have grown up and it is decided whom they are to marry. The same with kittens' names. The naming ought to be left to the people with whom they are eventually going to live. I can't keep more than one of them, you know. We should be what they call *cat-ridden*.'

This was the first I heard of it. From that day the thought hung over me that our pleasant little party would have to be broken up. I wondered if I could possibly contrive to be the one They kept. I could not bear the idea of moving to a new home. But mother said it was the law of nature. Her motto was from a poem of Miss Jean Ingelow that Auntie May had once quoted—

To bear, to nurse, to rear,
To love and then to lose. . . .

She never worried—much, though she confessed at first it was rather trying, and that she caught herself wandering about looking into corners, searching for what she knew went away in a basket the day before. It was just a habit mothers got into, and when a few weeks had elapsed she just shook herself and thought no more of the kitten that had gone to make its mark on some one else's chair cushions. 'Dear me!' she used to say, 'I have on an average five kittens a year. What should I do with them all hanging about, getting in my way at every turn? I should become irritable, I should snap at them, I should positively hate them as soon as they became independent and I could do nothing for them. It is best as it is.'

After that speech of mother's, I was not so sure that I wanted to be the kitten They chose to keep, that is, if mother meant to turn round and bully me as soon as I could stand up for myself. It seemed strange to hear her talk like that, and yet one likes to be forewarned.

Rosamond gave us temporary names—reach-me-down names, she called them. Fred B. Nicholson was allowed to stand; the boy Auntie May called Admiral Togo, a Japanese name, I understand.

The two girls were Zobeide and Blanch. I was called Loki, after the devil.

They did not know, but we all had one name already, a traditional one in our family. It was Pasht. Our ancestors lived at a place called Bubastis. For convenience' sake, however, we stuck to the names They gave us. They seemed to have an idea that we should answer to them and come when we were called, but mother told us on no account ever to do so, it would be false to every tradition of our class. We might go as far as to twitch an ear when we heard our name spoken pleasantly, but only on the very rarest occasions were we to stir a paw. Then, if we decided to go to Them, it was at least manners to stop halfway and scratch. If the name was spoken in an unfriendly tone, the thing to do was just to stare the impertinent creature down. At Bubastis, in the olden time, our ancestors had been worshipped and prayed to. In the studio downstairs, where mother had been a constant visitor in the days when she was free of domestic cares, there is one of our ancestors under a glass case just as he was buried when he died thousands of years ago. He is all wrapped in a sort of brown greased cloth, so mother says, many hundred folds of it, but

still you can perfectly well see the original shape of our many-hundreds-of-times-over great-uncle. Nobody has ever unwrapped him; it would be very wicked to do it, and might bring misfortune on the house. Altogether he is treated with the greatest respect, and mother is quite content to have it so. We are taught to look on that room not as the studio as They do, but as the Family Tomb, and mother says that when we grow up and are permitted to sit there sometimes, we must all keep very quiet and behave seriously and do no romping.

CHAPTER II

ONE LESS THAN FIVE

ONE morning we woke up, and found mother had left us. The window was open, and mother had suddenly felt tired of nursing and as if she must have a breath of fresh air. She was outside on a kind of coping there was all round the house. Nobody was worrying at all when in came Mary and Rosamond. They called to mother to come in at once, for it was blowing a cold east wind, and then suddenly they discovered that she was in difficulties. She had jumped off the coping to another piece that stuck out at the side, and now, though she wanted to come back, her resolution had deserted her, and she thought she should never be able to do it. She told us all this, but Mary and Rosamond only thought she was crying out piteously.

'She can do it quite easily, Miss, if she will

only face it,' said Mary. 'It stands to reason that if she could jump there, she can jump back!'

'Of course, Mary,' said Rosamond. 'What you can do once you can do again. Come, you silly-billy! Jump! Don't be a coward!'

Mother explained that the more she thought about it, the more she couldn't do it, and that perhaps if they would go away and leave her to herself, she would feel differently, but of course they couldn't understand her. They took a small chair and held it out of the window with one hand. Mother knew that if she were to leap upon that, her weight would make them drop it, and, sure enough, they did drop it all the same, and it went clattering down into the garden below. Then they said 'Ow! Whatever 'll Miss May say?' and shut the window. Mother was glad of that, for the wind was really too cold for us as we lay inside, and as a matter of fact she was not in the slightest danger if only they would go away, go downstairs and pick up the pieces of the chair in the garden. She mildly suggested it to them, but they did not even begin to understand.

'Aw, poor thing, don't her mew come faint-like through the window!' said that silly Mary. 'You

and me can't both leave her, Miss. Shall one of us go and fetch Miss May?'

'Do, do go away!' implored mother, 'and then I shall be able to make my jump!'

'I have an idea!' said Rosamond, and she came to our basket and picked up Zobeide, and carried her to the window and held her out to mother. Of course Zobeide screamed, and poor mother couldn't stand that and her legs obeyed her unconsciously and brought her in at once. She said 'Thank you' to Rosamond as she crossed the sill and walloped back into her bed and begged them to shut the window, which of course they didn't do, and it was open half an hour later when Auntie May came up from her singing lesson and Rosamond told her with pride what she had done. Auntie May knows a great deal about cats. She said at once that it wasn't necessary, that Petronilla would have known quite enough to come in of her own accord, and that it was too cold a day to hold a young kitten out in the raw air; still, as far as she could see, we were all perfectly well, and feeding away busily, so probably no harm was done.

Mother said to us that she wasn't quite so sure of that, for the wind was very cold, and she took particular care of Zobeide, and gave her the best

place, and cuddled her till Zobeide squealed and said she didn't like affection if it meant being held so tight.

Next morning, when Auntie May came and stood over the basket, she seemed very grave.

'Rosamond, come here,' she said. 'Which kitten did you hold out of the window?'

'I am afraid I don't quite know which,' Rosamond said, very much puzzled and upset, as I could tell by her voice. 'It was *one* of the girls, Blanch or Zobeide, but I am sure I could not say which of them. Why? What is the matter?'

'Come and look!' said Auntie May.

Then I myself noticed for the first time that Blanch was lying a little way off mother, and breathing very funnily. Her body seemed to break in half under the skin with every breath she took, and she gave a great shake right across her. She was flattened out and her legs parted wide so that her chest was spread along the floor of the basket. She made a rushing noise with her breathing like what one hears when the bath is filling.

'She looks just like a frog!' said Rosamond. 'Oh, Auntie May, is she ill, and is it my fault?'

'Do you think it was Blanch you held over the window?'

'I said before I don't know, but perhaps it was.'

'It looks rather like it,' said Auntie May sadly, and put on her hat and jacket and fetched the doctor.

'Lor', for a kitten!' said Mary.

'It's worth three guineas if it lives, Mary,' said Rosamond through her tears. 'But it won't, and it will be my fault. I have murdered it!'

'Don't cry, pretty child!' mother said to her. 'It was Zobeide you held out of the window, and look at her sleeping so sweetly here under my paw! This is Blanch who is dying, and it is the will of Providence.'

Poor Rosamond couldn't understand her, and began to abuse her for her calmness.

'You *are* a heartless old thing, Petronilla, you are! Look at you, calmly nursing four kittens, while one of them is too ill even to eat!'

'Of course it will not eat. It will die,' said mother gently, and as usual Rosamond didn't understand.

'Oh yes, you may mew, and try to palaver me, but that won't stop me thinking you a heartless beast!'

'I *am* a beast,' answered mother sweetly.

'Oh, please, please, make it eat! or else it will starve!'

'It *will* starve,' said mother, but she made no opposition when Rosamond tried to make the poor little Blanch feed like the rest of us. We had never stopped eating; we knew we couldn't do anything for poor Blanch, and we knew, too, that it was Zobeide who had been held out of the window, and longed to tell May she was mistaken and put her out of her misery. When Dr. Hobday came twenty minutes later, we had to listen to Auntie May telling him the story, and asking him if that was what had made Blanch ill?

'It is very unlikely,' said he. 'This kitten was probably unhealthy from the first. It has pneumonia now, and I am afraid in such a young kitten the case is pretty well hopeless; but we will try to save it, if you think it worth while?'

'It is *not* worth while,' said mother loudly and clearly, but, of course, no one took any notice of her—she was *called* the Talking Cat, but they didn't really think it was talking, only general friendliness—and Auntie May said she meant to try and save Blanch's life.

First of all Blanch was put into a separate

basket, lined with flannel; a piece of flannel was to be sewn round her with little holes for her front paws to go out of. She had to lie on a hot bottle. The temperature of the room had to be kept up to sixty-three degrees. She was to be fed every two hours, on a mixture of milk and sugar and hot water, about equal parts, so as to make something as like mother's milk as possible.

'I shall have to sit up with her,' said Auntie May, 'or buy an alarm clock to wake me up every two hours.'

'Oh, Auntie May, do let *me* sit up!' cried Rosamond.

'Why, you are but a kitten yourself!'

'Ah, but I'm over three years old,' said Rosamond. 'I am twelve years old. I suppose that represents a kitten's twelve weeks, doesn't it? So this kitten is three weeks, that is to say three years old.'

'It is a baby in arms,' said Auntie May, 'and is going to be fed with a bottle, like other babies.'

She had got a doll's feeding-bottle she had bought once at a bazaar, and she tried that, but it was defective and would not let the milk run through. Then she got her stylographic pen-filler and dipped that in the milk she had arranged

and sucked some up, and squirted it out into Blanch's mouth, and really got some in that way; but it was a slow business, and poor Blanch used to hate being disturbed dreadfully. She was too young to talk, but she used to get into a regular temper sometimes and turn away her body with a scraping noise in her throat that meant how disgusted she was with life and people trying to cure her.

She was an awfully pretty kitten. 'Oh, you *are* a beauty,' Auntie May used to say, 'and I wish I could save you.'

Blanch had been much more forward in some ways than the rest of us; she had climbed all over Auntie May, and had a strong little back, and could sit up and look grown up, though she was only three. Her fur was nice too, a very much lighter grey than Zobeide's or mine, and her head very broad, and the distance between her small ears very great.

Her sick-basket was in a different part of the room from ours; *we* could not, of course, get out to look at her, and I don't believe mother ever did. Auntie May did not seem to expect her to. She always told her how Blanch was, and mother used to say that Blanch was in good hands, and

that Auntie May could do what *she* could not do for Blanch, feed her through stylographic pens, for instance. But she always said that though it was very good of Auntie May to devote herself so, she could not alter the result of Blanch's illness; no sick kitten as young as that could possibly recover. If only it had learned to feed itself, there would be a chance for it, and not much even then. She was glad for our sakes that Auntie May had parted us; she believed in the segregation of invalids. She had learned that hard long word in the cattery.

After two days the doctor came and looked at Blanch. He didn't take her up.

'This kitten is better!' he said in a surprised tone. 'It breathes more freely. You may save it yet. If you want to apply for the post of nurse for animals I'll recommend you, Miss Graham.'

The day after that Blanch was so much better that Auntie May went to a party which was given in a house near by. She was to be only two hours away. She fed Blanch at nine, after she was dressed, kneeling down beside her in her new pink dress. Having left Blanch quite comfortable, and pretty well, hardly coughing at all, she went away singing down the stairs. Rosamond was, of course,

in bed. She went to bed at half-past eight, and made a great fuss about it every night. We four went to sleep. Mother liked the temperature kept at sixty degrees; *à quelque chose malheur est bon*, she said, which means bad-luck is good for something, and sent us to sleep with her soft purring.

Punctually at eleven I was awakened by the swish of Auntie May's dress on the stairs, and she came up followed by Mary, and the electric light was turned full on.

'Bring me my traps, Mary,' said Auntie May, and she sat down just as she was and began to mix the water and sweetened hot milk. When she had got it ready she leaned over the patient, and then called out.

'Come here, Mary,' she said in a queer voice. 'This kitten is dying!'

'The doctor said it was better, Miss.'

'So it is better—its breathing is better—but it is dying all the same. Look at its eyes!'

'Just like my old aunt's died last June! Well, Miss, it's only a kitten after all!'

Auntie May held Blanch up in her two hands and looked at her. She gave her her medicine and a little drop—a real drop, not what the cook here

calls a drop—of brandy, but Blanch let it all roll out of her mouth and on to the pink gown. I knew that from what Mary said: 'Lor', Miss, your nice gown!'

'It's no good, Mary. Its eyes are glazing already. They look tormented. We mustn't plague her any more. Bring Petronilla!'

'How absurd!' said mother, as Mary lifted her out.

Auntie May showed her Blanch, whom she had laid back in her bed. Blanch's head had rolled quite uncomfortably back, and her eyes saw nothing. She was almost gone.

Mother didn't do at all what they expected, though; indeed, I don't know whether they expected her to bring Blanch back from the grave in some mysterious way that mothers ought to know of. Mother had no way. She knew it was no good. To satisfy them she did something. She licked and rolled Blanch over in her bed with her tongue—roughly, I suppose, from the way they spoke.

'She's killed it!' said Auntie May. 'Look, it's dead!'

She took Blanch up, and Blanch's head fell back over her hand and a film came over her eyes—so Auntie May said afterwards.

Poor Auntie May put Blanch down again, and cried as if her heart would break.

'I nursed it—I took such care—and he said I had saved it, and no, it's dead—oh!—oh!——'

'Don't cry, Miss May, don't cry so,' Mary begged. 'It's only a kitten at that. We'll bury it in the garden. It will be our first funeral; there's a nice little place back of them trees, I've often thought of it for that. Here, let me get you out of your dress. I'll put the corpse in the bathroom till the morning. What 'll ever your father think if he hears you crying like this over a kitten, and wake Miss Rosamond, too!'

Then Auntie May stopped, because she wasn't selfish, and let Mary put her to bed, and went to sleep very soon after. I asked mother if she wouldn't mind telling me why she had licked Blanch so hard.

'My dear child,' mother said, 'I daresay you and Auntie May consider me very unfeeling, and think it very odd that she should do all the crying instead of me; but then you must realise that I was never in favour of nursing Blanch and trying to keep her alive. She was delicate and bound to die sooner or later. It is a great mistake to try to preserve the lives of kittens that are weak and

feeble from the very beginning, and no sensible cat would ever countenance such a proceeding. They do as they choose with theirs, and a nice lot of invalids, cripples, and criminals They raise up to make difficulties afterwards for them! As a matter of fact, Blanch *was* cured of her illness, and I don't deny any of the credit to Auntie May of having done it—I couldn't have done it myself —but, as the doctor will tell her to-morrow, the child died of heart-failure. I knew it would go like that. When they called me in I had to do something for form's sake, and I licked her. Poor little dear, we must forget about this closing scene of her very short career, and try to grow up healthy ourselves. That I look upon as a cat's first duty. You ask why? In the battle of life the weaklings must go under. Now feed properly and don't choke, as you are sure to do if you are greedy and in too much of a hurry.'

Rosamond was told about Blanch next day, and she cried too. Fresh from my mother's lecture I looked upon her almost with disgust. The silly child talked of going into mourning, and, sure enough, she found an old bit of black crape somewhere and sewed it on the arm of her frock. I had no patience with her. We relations were, on the

contrary, forbidden to make any difference, and mother was even gay, though I noticed a tear in her eyes sometimes when nobody was looking. I heard Rosamond propose to bring poor Blanch, who by now, she said, had grown quite stiff, to show to her mother for a last look before she was buried; but, to mother's great relief, Mary had taken Blanch and buried her before breakfast by Auntie May's orders.

'Don't be morbid, my dear child!' Auntie May said, when Rosamond complained of what Mary had done. 'I don't like any one to gloat over funerals, much less children. You must forget Blanch, poor dear Blanch, who made such a brave fight for her life, and remember that there are four left.'

So you see in the main she said the same thing as mother, which convinces me, as I said before, that she knew a good deal about cats.

CHAPTER III

TO LAP OR NOT TO LAP

'It is time they were taught to lap!' said Auntie May.

'Oh, Auntie May,' cried Rosamond, 'how dreadfully exciting! I was wondering when you were going to begin that! It *will* be dreadfully exciting, won't it?'

'It will be dreadfully messy,' answered Auntie May. 'I must do it in an old frock and my art pinafore.'

'Oh, Auntie May, I shall love to see you in a pinafore! You will look like a big French doll—that one of mine that Kitty spoiled.'

'Hush, don't speak ill of the absent. I daresay Kitty enjoyed the destruction of Wilhelmina very much, as much as Petronilla liked mumbling my white satin shoes last year. I forgave her. One must pay for one's pets.'

'And I forgave Kitty,' said Rosamond; 'besides, I am twelve now and past dolls. When shall we begin to feed the kittens?'

'Wait a bit!' mother said; but, of course, once having got the idea into Their heads, they took no notice. Auntie May got the big pinafore she had when she was an art student, out of a box, and put it on. Then she fetched a tiny china spoon with forget-me-nots all over it, and sent Rosamond down for some milk and some hot water. Then Rosamond and she squatted down on the floor beside our bed, and mother eyed them scornfully over the edge of it.

'Now, you silly old Petronilla, we are going to relieve you of some of your work. Four kittens are too much for you. You are beginning to look rather fagged in spite of Beef-tea and Kreochyle and Hovis food. Children, dear, you cost a pretty penny.'

These were the names of some of the messes They were continually bringing up in saucers and planting out by mother's bedside, and which she hopped out and licked up and came back again saying that Auntie May had a feeling heart and that she adored her, since, as every one ought to know, the way to a cat's heart is through its

stomach, whatever may be the cause of affection afterwards. And mother did love Auntie May quite desperately much, and Auntie May could always see it in her eyes, though mother was not otherwise demonstrative.

Well, as I was saying, they managed to unhitch Fred's claws and mouth, and laid him in Auntie May's lap, and put the point of the little china spoon in between his teeth. He sputtered and choked, and he seemed to have a white beard when they let him alone again.

'He isn't taking any this time!' said Auntie May. There were white streams wandering through the rucks of her pinafore.

'Of course he is not taking any of your extraordinary preparation,' said mother. 'You are in too great a hurry to have him lap. He won't do it a moment before he is ready, and that will be when I decide to begin to wean him. You can try every day and you won't do him any harm, but you will only wet your pinafore.'

It was quite true. We none of us felt as if we could touch Auntie May's mixture, we so very much preferred mother's. Auntie May put us all back again, and stood up and shook herself, and the milk we hadn't taken ran down the creases of

THE MILK RAN DOWN THE CREASES
TO THE FLOOR.

her pinafore on to the floor. They both went away, and Rosamond, as she went out of the door, recommended mother to tidy it by licking it up, partly in joke—at least mother took it that way, for, as she said, she was not a common cat, to eat up slops, and they would have to send Mary to wash it away with a cloth.

Next morning They tried us again, but still we couldn't, and Rosamond seemed so terribly disappointed that we asked mother to tell us how it was done.

'You have to put your tongue over the milk and catch some of it up in the curve of it, and flick it into your throat in the same movement. That's all there is!'

'And quite enough,' sighed lazy Freddy.

'Dogs do it differently,' mother continued. 'They put their tongue *under* the milk or water, or whatever it is they want to drink, but they toss it into their mouths in precisely the same way.'

'I shall never do it,' poor Zobeide complained. 'You will have to nurse me all my days, mother.'

'You great fat podge!' I said. (Zobeide was very roundabout.) 'Mother can't nurse you when you are taken away from her and sold, as you are sure to be. Then you will get thinner and

thinner, till you starve, unless they feed you with a stylographic penholder, like poor Blanch; but she was an invalid.'

'Don't jar, children,' mother said, 'but give your minds to business. To-morrow, when they begin teaching you again, don't sputter so much, but try and make a start. It comes all at once, and once gained you never lose the art. You try and you seem no nearer, and suddenly—you find you can do it! Now I will tell you as a fact that I shan't be able to feed you exclusively for much longer. I don't know about looking fagged, but I certainly begin to feel it. I can't, for all the trouble I take, keep my coat as nice as I should like to, and that is a sure sign that the fatigue is beginning to tell on me. Four great kittens! They ought to have got a foster-mother—and I should not have liked that altogether! But I tell you that the time has come when you must all try to reinforce me and supplement what I can give you from extraneous sources.' Mother did use nice long words.

So next day, when they brought the whole set-out, I thought I would really have a good try, and I swallowed down the spoonful of milk without sputtering. But *that* wasn't lapping, mother called

loudly from the bed. I was stung by that, so when Auntie May put a little milk in a very flat saucer and ducked my head in it, I stayed in a minute and worked my tongue about. When I could positively bear it no longer, I came up again spitting and sputtering, not a drop of milk having gone down my throat. But I found that if she didn't roughly shove my head in, but let me bend over the saucer myself, and not go deep in, but skim about on the top, I could manage to flick up a little; though perhaps I only fancied I had done that, from the milk that got on to the fur about my mouth. It really was not at all bad stuff. Auntie May still went on putting the point of the little spoon down my throat, and I got a certain amount of milk into me that way, and wasn't so hungry afterwards. Fred, I must say, had no perseverance. He sulked and tossed his head, jibbed, as Auntie May called it, and would have nothing to say to the spoon; while as for the saucer, he walked straight across that and out on the other side. *I* couldn't do the things Freddy does; he has a 'cheek,' Auntie May says, and Rosamond says he is like Kitty, whom I have never seen, but, judging from all they say of her, she must be the naughtiest kitten in Yorkshire. When Freddy has walked

right through the saucer and is all whitened, he sits down and drinks the milk off his toes, showing that he knows quite well it is meant to eat, not to bathe in, and, as Auntie May says, simply defies her.

The bad example of my brother made me somehow determine I would accomplish lapping, and, sure enough, next day I did. You should have heard the noise They all made!

'Loki can do it! Loki has done it! He's lapped three laps! He is getting some into his mouth! He has lapped first! Hooray! Bravo, Loki!'

I heard Them, but I did not look round till I had lapped right down to the pattern on the saucer. Then I raised my head proudly. Everything looked quite different now somehow. I felt another kitten. Yet nothing really was changed. Rosamond's moonface was as round as ever, Auntie May was still sitting there with her apron full of great pools where Fred and Zobeide and Admiral Togo had let it run down out of the corners of their mouths, mother was purring away and looking at us all with her great big mournful eyes.

In less than a week I was no better or cleverer than everybody else. The others could do it too, but they hated the bother of it. The other way

is really so much more convenient. And mother prefers it; she says that it brings us together. She says:

'As long as I nurse you children, I shall be devoted to you. I shall cosset you and shield you and watch over you, and get miserable if you are in a draught or let people handle you or tease you, and so on; but once you can look after yourselves, it will be a very different pair of paws, I warn you! That is cat rule all the world over. I shall not, I hope, be actually unkind, but I shall take the very slightest notice of you. Out of the nursery, out of mind. Lost to sight, to memory you will not be dear, for if I allowed myself to become unduly fond of any one of my children, how could I bear to have that child taken from me? One has to steel oneself. They under whom we live are responsible, though, perhaps, in a state of nature, in that jungle of which I have visions and of which I dream at night as if it were my kingdom, it would be the same—I cannot tell.'

We all said politely, 'Oh, mother, I am sure you would never be unkind,' but indeed afterwards we found she spoke quite truly. She could not help it; it was the way she was made. Cats have the softest outsides, but the hardest hearts of all

animals. Later on, nobody would have known that she was my mother from the way she bullied me, and let out with her paws when I passed her sometimes, without the slightest warning, and didn't seem to care when I hurt myself at all. There was the time when I was ill and fed out of that very forget-me-not spoon that ought to have stirred up tender recollections. I bit a piece out of that spoon in a fit of temper one day when I felt particularly bad, and was in a blue rage in consequence. I damaged the spoon, of course, as mother pointed out, but I hurt myself far more. I bled, and the spoon did not. It had a rivet put in it and was as well as ever again.

I felt mother's unkindness very much, and it was of a piece with many other bits of her conduct. I have got over it now; indeed, I have had my revenge if I had wanted it, when I saw her making a slave of herself over another lot of kittens just as she had done over us. She began to be grateful to me then, for I made myself useful taking her place in the basket sometimes, and keeping the little wretches warm while she took a turn and stretched her legs, and went to look if Auntie May had been given or had bought anything new. Mother always took notice of that sort of thing;

SHE USED TO STAND ON HER HIND LEGS
AND LOOK AT THE PAINTING.

nothing new that came into the house ever escaped her for long. She even knew when Mr. Graham was engaged on a different picture, at least he said she did. She used to stand on her hind legs and plant her fore paws on the ledge of the easel and look at the painting he was doing quite gravely. The artist himself was certain that she knew, and he used to tickle her neck with his brush or his mahl-stick and say, 'Well, Petronilla, do you approve of my new subject?' That is how mother ascertained that it *was* new, for if he had covered all the canvas up, without leaving one little weeny corner white, how on earth could a poor cat tell? While she was away on these voyages of discovery, I curled round the kittens, and they liked me for about ten minutes till they found I was not their mother. I could not feed them, only wash them, and that I did very nicely and thoroughly, so that mother said when she came back that she could not have done it better herself.

But this state of things was not until much later; for the present we four were the kittens of the hour, and she petted us, and was the dearest, sweetest little mother in the world.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOLROOM

We soon could do more than lap, we could eat things. Auntie May and Rosamond had a chafing-dish, and they used to cook all sorts of messes in it for us and for mother, who was very fussy about her food, and took dislikes to the most ordinary things. For instance, porridge she would not touch, or cod-liver oil biscuits, while Hovis food, or Horlick's, or a sardine put her out of her mind with delight. They say that a sardine will sometimes bring a dying cat back to life. They burnt methylated spirit in the chafing-dish, and the first time I saw the sly curling flame winding up among Auntie May's new novel, I confess I was frightened. But mother reassured us; she said if I looked attentively I would see that it was a very obedient flame, and would go straight up into the air and do no harm unless they interrupted it. She gave

it a wide berth herself, and hoped we would do the same when we began to be able to get out of our basket and walk about. Auntie May and Rosamond were not so very careful, for once when they thought the spirit was getting low, Rosamond took the whole bottle and poured some more on. Huh! it took fire, and she dropped it pretty quick, and it broke, and there were three separate burning pools on the floor. Mother put a paw over us all, though we could not have got out of the bed even if we had wanted to, and gripped Freddy by the neck, ready to lift him out if it should be necessary. Luckily Auntie May was there, and there was a large flowerpot full of earth in the room. She tilted out the flower, head over roots, and poured the earth on the burning pools, instead of the water which Rosamond had torn off to the bathroom to get. It was soon out, and the poor child got a scolding and a lesson in chemistry from her grandpapa.

They had not got proper things to work with, mother said. They had no spoon, but used to stir up the mixture with the butt-end of one of Auntie May's pens. When it was ready, they would pour it out into any piece of china that was handy—Japanese pots and plates that cost a fortune, so I

was told. Then they washed them up in the bath, and we used to hear this sort of thing: 'Mind that cloisonné, Rosamond!' or, 'That is a bit of Persian four-mark you have chipped, I do believe!' But it was no matter, they got a new bit out of the studio. Mr. Graham was a collector, and nothing was too good for the cats.

Up to now, none of us had ever succeeded in getting out of the bed by ourselves. We were lifted out by them to walk about a little, keeping our stomachs off the ground with great difficulty. Our legs had a strange tendency to slip away beyond us, 'doing splits' as they do in the pantomime—so Auntie May called our way of getting ourselves along. When at last we did succeed in keeping our legs at right angles to our bodies, we wobbled sadly, and longed to be put back again among the hay. But at times, when we weren't eating or sleeping, but thoroughly awake, and there wasn't much doing in the old dull bed, we used to try to get out of it. We three boys used to make a ladder of Zobeide, and, propping ourselves up on her, get over the edge in a jerk, but at first we could only one of us look over, and then Zobeide would meanly crumble away under us, and pitch us all head-over-heels into the bed

again. She took an unfair advantage, too, and bit our hind legs.

One day, however, I managed to climb up without the help of Zobeide, till my paws rested on the top of the basket, and I was screwing up my hind legs till they came nearly up to join the front ones, when somebody — I believe it was Rosamond—gave the after-part of me a push and I came over on to the floor on my nose, which, luckily, is flat, not Roman. I rose unsteadily, and walked away like one in a dream. I think I must have walked right out of the door and into the bathroom. Rosamond was behind me, and I had a sort of feeling that I would like to run away from her—a feeling that I have had many a time since with nearly all of Them. It was because she was behind me. Now if she had been in front I should have longed to pass her, and then turn round and jeer at her. But as it was, Run! Run! was my motto, and into a corner for preference. I chose a corner, and squeezed myself in behind some old boxes in the bathroom. They must have been very full of dust, for I sneezed twice and so told Rosamond where I was, and she put a great hand like a house in and caught hold of me.

'Naughty little thing!' she said. That was

the first hint I had that They expect us to stay beside them and not run away. I took the hint; at least, I was good enough to stop running away sometimes, when she said my name very decidedly. You never know what They may have in their hands to make it worth your while to stop; as often as not it is something to eat. Rosamond put me back in the box, and mother cleaned me for half-an-hour quite unnecessarily, saying, 'My children shall be kept unspotted from the world as far as I can manage it, for the world is very dirty.'

She is indeed most particular. She washed off the marks of people's hands carefully wherever they had touched us. It looks rude, I think, to see a cat, the moment it has been kindly stroked, turn round and begin to lick the stain away. Rosamond said it is just as if she took out her pocket-handkerchief after grandpapa had kissed her, and wiped her cheek with it.

We could all get out of our bed now. In fact, we would not stay in, except for sleeping and eating (mother still fed us a little, so as to let us down easy). We were all over the place, and the door of the study had to be always kept shut. Rosamond said that being cat-maid was much

harder than lessons at home, for she could keep Fraülein in order, but she could not keep us.

'I *can't* keep them in,' she complained to her grandpapa. 'I collect them all in my pinafore and drop them all into bed, and out they ooze in a moment like so many indiarubber balls! Fred especially is a *fiend*. He is in to everything. He is outside everything. He touches everything—licks it mostly. I am glad to say that he burnt his nose badly the other day on the electric radiator. He won't touch that again in a hurry!'

No, that he won't! He singed off a bit of his whiskers, and we all laughed at him awfully. He was a queer little cat, not a bit like Zobeide or Togo. *We* never wanted to fight, but he lay down in a corner of the bed and said, 'Come on, you!' Then Zobeide or I took a hand, and he knocked us down and drove the straws into our eyes. Mother punished him by taking him in her arms and kicking him with her hind legs, but he bit her face and she had to leave off. When we packed ourselves to go to sleep, mother happening to be away, we always made a sort of cross, lying over each other for warmth, and Freddy always took the top, out of his turn, and having so much the biggest head, always managed to get his own

way. We three others hoped that the first one of us Auntie May sold or gave away would be Fred, but nothing was said about that. Auntie May bought a ball with a jingle in it for us all, she distinctly said so, but Fred always assumed that it was his ball, and he went so far as to claw the jingle out of it, saying that it amused him quite as much without. We never got a chance of playing with that ball unless Auntie May happened to leave her house shoes in the room, and then Fred said we might take the ball, for he didn't get a chance of real leather to gnaw every day.

Altogether he was a terror, and Mary used to say she would like to wring his neck. That didn't frighten Fred; he knew she wouldn't do anything of the kind, and he went on jumping on to the back of her neck, and getting among the ashes when she was lighting the fire and being swept up by mistake, and plopping on to paper parcels, and eating coals, and needles, and buttons, and corks, and working off a hundred wicked tricks he had invented.

You see, Fred never would attend to mother's lectures when we were left quite alone in the room, and she told us all the little catly rules

that we should have to guide our conduct by when we left her. Some of them, she said, were traditional, going back to the days beyond the dawn of history, when cats were worshipped. She said we must never forget that great fact, never allow ourselves to lose sight of it, but let it regulate all our conduct and our relations towards Them. They no longer worship us, though they are kind to us. They have perhaps forgotten, but we need not. Therefore we must be gentle, obedient, subservient to Them, but with a reservation. We should, if we thought proper, come to their call, but never with vulgar alacrity. She thought it the highest possible praise of a cat to have said of him, as Auntie May had once said of a friend's cat, 'The more he is called, the more he doesn't come.' We should find time to sit down on the way and make pretence to attend to our personal appearance, or what not. We might suffer Them to hold us in their arms, but not in inconvenient or indecorous positions, such as upside down, or round their necks like a boa, or pretending we are wheelbarrows, and so on. She said They—the more punctilious of Them—have a way of holding a cat up by the loose skin of its neck, that being

considered the least uncomfortable one to us personally. Quite a mistake, she said; they only think so because we do not usually protest—how can we, when the skin is strained so tightly over our throats as to preclude all attempt at conversation? The only proper way to hold a cat is to take both hands to it and support the lower limbs, instead of letting the whole weight of the body depend from the shoulders or the paws. She told us how to open a door, if it was left ever so little ajar. That is to walk up it—about two good steps will do. If it is shut, the handle should be turned; but that needs special aptitudes. Then if we mew passionately before a closed door and it is opened for us, we should not go in, as would naturally occur to an undisciplined cat to do, but sit down at a distance and lick our face, so as to show we do not really care about it.

She told us the proper way to lie down—never at once, but after having described two or three circles. The right thing to do is to turn round and round, brushing our fur the right way till we are more or less in the form of a ball. Then, and not till then, we may definitely lie down with an expression of contentment if we feel like it. We are to imagine ourselves making a nest in

some very high grass, beating it down all round us to form a bed before we can settle in for the night. Then we must tuck our heads in symmetrically, and safely too, taking care to keep one eye free, ready to open and see what is going on, and an ear cocked to hear strange or unusual sounds. That kind of high long grass was, she said, called jungle grass, and our ancestors long ago, in the time before they were worshipped, lived in the jungle and ran wild there. The worshipping came afterwards.

She taught us humility, too. When we heard the strays howling outside in the square garden, too weak to catch birds for their food perhaps, and begging a morsel or a cup of milk from door to door, we were to pause in our own feeding and think, 'This cat's ancestors were probably kings, like mine. I must not be stuck-up.'

Sometimes even Fred would leave off roaming and sitting away by himself, thinking over and planning some new bit of mischief to do, and come back to bed and take the warm place that Zobeide had made, and beg mother to tell us about 'Dirty Whitey' of the underground. We had all heard it many a time, but it was a nice story.

Mother had seen her once the time she was in the underground at Notting Hill Gate with Auntie May, and Auntie May had said:

'Oh, bother, there's that wretched cat again! It makes me quite sick to see it playing about between the rails.'

She was waiting for her train, and a nice porter was standing near her, and he said:

'Bless you, Miss, she knows her way better nor any of us. She takes a little walk to High Street, Kensington, now and again, and comes back quite safe and sound. She bringed up a family of kittens there in the tunnel and never a one was hurt. But I don't doubt myself she'll get copped some day!'

Auntie May said she thought so too, and she walked along to the other end of the platform to avoid seeing the white cat crossing the line just out of bravado as the train was coming in. When her own train came along, she said she felt as if that cat would be under it and be cut in bits. But it wasn't, for she saw it again a week later, and told mother. Then quite a month later she came in and told mother that 'Dirty Whitey' had been 'copped' at last.

'Whitey' had been chasing a rat across the

metals when a train was just coming in, and professional pride had forbidden her to let go. So the train had cut off her head with the tail of that rat in her mouth—at least, so the porter had told Auntie May. We loved that story, and, as I have said, even Freddy used to come and listen when mother began to tell it to us.

Zobeide liked the story of the cat that walked all the way to London after its master, who was very meanly moving house and had intended not to take the family cat. Instinct, mother said. It seemed to work both ways, for another cat was brought in a covered basket away from the house it had been born in to one a hundred miles away in quite another part of the country. It never saw anything, for it had been packed up in the room in the first house, and the basket was not undone till they had got into a room in the other and shut the door. No matter, for that cat was not to be beaten. It just went straight up the chimney and home again. It evidently loved places better than people, Zobeide remarked.

'It is generally the way,' mother would answer, 'but *I* happen to love Auntie May, and where *she* is, is home to me. I'm not sure I even believe those stories. I know that I should be puzzled

to find my way back to Egerton Gardens, even if I wanted to! Probably if I once started, the gods of my ancestors would endow me with a sixth sense and show me the way.'

Admiral Togo always asked for the Whittington story and got it, but I didn't care for it. I liked the story of the cat that told the people of the house that the basement was on fire, by running into their bedroom with her coat all smouldering where a hot splinter had fallen on it, and the Pied Piper of Hamelin. That was all about rats, as it happened, but no matter, it made my mouth water.

CHAPTER V

ONE LESS THAN FOUR

We all had a most terrible shock. Waking up from our afternoon sleep, we found that instead of being four, we were only three. Admiral Togo had gone. Mother had been asleep too, but she missed Togo first, and went routing about among us to make quite sure.

'I can't surely have mislaid him,' we heard her muttering. 'Or is it what I fear?'

'Perhaps he has got over the edge of the bed into the great world,' said Zobeide, 'and is hiding somewhere to tease us.'

'Possibly,' mother said gently. She jumped out of bed, and looked all over the room and into every corner. She called gently to Togo once or twice, using a special pet name of her own, and she was still wandering about when Rosamond came

up with mother's dinner. She saw the state of affairs at once.

'Aha, old girl, looking for your kitten?' she said. 'Can't find Togo, eh?'

It struck me as suspicious that she knew which of us mother was seeking without looking into the basket. Mother answered quite crossly, 'No, nothing in particular.' She didn't want Rosamond to know that she valued Togo, or any kitten that ever was born.

'Well, then, dear Pet, I must tell you. Togo was getting too old to run about with women and children, and he has had his curls cut off, and been packed off to a preparatory school!'

'Tsha!' mother spat angrily. She didn't choose to be chaffed by a child. 'School! I am not going to be put off with a cock-and-bull story like that.'

But she couldn't keep it up for very long. She did really care what had become of Admiral Togo, and she hung her head and dropped her tail and tried to get behind the door.

'Poor Petronilla! You seem very much distressed!' observed Auntie May, coming in just then, and kindly lifting mother up, and putting her back with us. 'But you are a sensible cat—I

never knew a sensibler—and you have been through this kind of thing before. Cheer up! You have three left.'

'And I wonder how long I shall have them?' mother muttered. 'You are making pretty quick work with them. You have killed one, and now you have sold the other——'

Her bitterness made her unjust, because Auntie May didn't kill Blanch, though she certainly had sold Admiral Togo, for what Rosamond said next showed it.

'May I go and see Togo?'

'You may. I am sure Mrs. Dillon will have no objection, but don't imagine for a moment that Togo will be glad to see *you*. Cats have hardly any memories, and kittens none at all. And a good thing too, for treated as chattels as they are they would have wretched lives of it. *They* don't listen to the rain upon the roof and think of other days, or have tears come into their eyes when they look at sunsets because they feel so ancient——'

'Why, Auntie May, you are talking like an old cat, while you are only a young woman. You aren't *very* old—not *more* than thirty, are you?'

'That is just the most miserable age,' said Auntie May; 'when I am forty I shall be as

cheerful as—old boots!' She actually wiped a tear away as she spoke. 'Good gracious me, Pet is simply murdering Freddy! Drop it—drop it!'

'Please don't interfere!' mother said, as well as she could speak with her mouth full of Freddy. 'If you only knew what he had been up to this afternoon you would be obliged to me, I can tell you! You will miss It presently, and wonder where it has got to. But I'll make the boy tell me where it is, and put it back too, before I have done with him!'

She gave it to Fred well, but she spared his pride and never told *us* where he had put Auntie May's opera-glasses. She hit very hard herself, but she never allowed us to lay a paw on each other, except in kindness. She was so afraid of our hurting each other, like Uncle Tomyris, who pulled out Uncle Ra's left eye once in a cattery brawl.

'They got Professor Hobday to come and fit him with an artificial one. They really did, word of an honest cat!' mother said. She told us some other things that the Professor did, such as bandaging a cat's broken arm and putting it in splints, also false teeth, but that was a dog, I think, and it was worth about three hundred pounds. No

cat that ever was born was worth that, mother says, but it is They who settle what we are all to cost, and They might be mistaken. They have agreed that cats are inferior to dogs; you may be as silly as you like about a dog, and even believe he has got a soul if you like, but a cat!—'My dear, it's too absurd!'

I hear this kind of thing in the drawing-room on Auntie May's at-home day, when we are often carried downstairs in a basket and allowed to play about and amuse the people. One hears a good deal. People who don't like cats think that Auntie May makes a perfect fool of herself about us. Once when Auntie May was persuaded to bring us down, to please a Mrs. Wheeler, I heard, with my own big ears, Mrs. Wheeler begin her sentence one way and finish it another.

'Lovely creatures, so beautiful in the firelight, when the light catches their outside fur and makes it shine like silver——' (Then Auntie May moved off and she went on) 'Poor, dear May! She is a bit of a bore with her cats, don't you think so? Do you notice how she always brings the conversation round to them in the end? It is a great mistake. She will be an old maid, it's a sure sign! Look at her now with a saucer on the floor and

those three cats making a Manx penny all round it, and a nice man wanting to talk to her, and can't get a word from her! He looks disgusted, and no wonder!'

Auntie May didn't really keep us downstairs very long, and the nice man, as it happened, carried us up for her to her study, and put us all back in our basket, and stayed up talking with her quite a long time, and talking about Mrs. Wheeler, the very woman who had been abusing Auntie May for loving us so.

'She's a cat, that's what she is!' the nice man said, and Auntie May agreed, which was rather insulting to us. I am, however, not quite sure whether he didn't say a *d* instead of a *t*, which with them makes quite a different word.

Presently they said it was June, and the weather got beautiful. Auntie May thought we ought to take the air in the garden, and be allowed to run about on the grass. Rosamond was overjoyed, and so were we, at first. Then we began to get frightened. There was absolutely nothing on the top of us except the sky and the sun. I missed the nice sheltering bed and the cosy walls of the room we had lived in always. I felt as if the top of my skull had been taken of. I saw nothing to hide

under either, except black poles that simply ran up straight into the blue. The sun was very hot, too, and I suppose I looked wretched, for suddenly Rosamond said:

'I do believe Loki has got a sunstroke, like Kitty had last year. His poor little head is so hot —feel!'

Auntie May was in such a fright that she bundled us all into the house.

Next day, when the sun was not quite so hot, she took us out again and we soon got used to it. Sometimes she chose me alone and took me on a lead and held the loop of it while she worked. She wrote on great white sheets of paper that the wind got under and tried to blow away. She told me to make myself useful and be a paperweight, but then when I sat on the freshly-written sheets it spread the ink all about and she did not seem to like that. At last the wind went down and she got interested and forgot me entirely. Rosamond sneaked the end of the lead out of her hand when she was not looking and held it; it seemed to give her the greatest pleasure to hold me in. It is odd how that child likes managing people, and positively begs for responsibility. Well, she took it this time, and a nice mess she made of it!

She opened her hand as she got interested in her book, and I simply walked away with the lead bobbling after me. I liked responsibility too.

Suddenly I saw a dog coming towards me—I knew it was a dog from the one that was embroidered on the child's crawler we had to lie on at home. He was black, coarse-furred, with small mean eyes, and a fringe that kept tumbling into them. He approached me. I did not like to turn, or cringe, or look afraid, but I felt my tail stiffening and my claws sliding out all ready, by no will of my own. There was an odd feeling in my back too. I knew as well as if you had told me that I should be rude and spit at him if he came nearer.

He did. I spat. He barked. Still Auntie May didn't leave off putting her pencil in her mouth and writing with it. Then my mood changed. I felt I should like to leave that dog—I wanted not to be where it was. After all I was only a kitten, and I turned round slowly and walked in the direction of Auntie May.

He came prancing after me. I ran. He ran. The lead was most awfully in my way. I went straight past Auntie May in my nervousness, and up one of the straight black poles that seemed to

lead up to Heaven—out of that dog's way, at any rate. It was a tree, so I heard after. Perhaps he could climb too — I didn't know! It was an instinct. The loop of the lead lay along the ground, and the idiotic puppy, as he must have been, hadn't the sense to hang on to it and drag me down. I think it was pretty clever of me to climb my first tree handicapped and shackled like that. Auntie May heard his short, sharp, cross barks, and came running and caught hold of the end of the lead to prevent me from going any higher up. Some people called off the puppy, and then, and not till then, did I allow myself to come down on to her shoulder, which she obligingly held under the exact bit of tree I was on.

It was much easier to go up than to come down. Perhaps I was excited then and made light of difficulties, but still mother told me that it was always the same way with her. Cats should look before they climb.

I scratched Auntie May's nose terribly for her as I came down, and it bled and had to be bathed. She was most kind about it.

'Never mind, darling, it won't matter. I am an ugly thing anyway, and I have *only* got to be

presented at Court to-morrow! Just a little unimportant occasion of that kind.'

'Can't you explain to the Queen,' said Rosamond, 'that your cat scratched you? I have always heard she is so very kind.'

'No, I shan't worry her with explanations,' said Auntie May; 'only soldiers' scratches are worth talking about. Let us go in.'

Mother lectured me when she heard of my adventure. 'You should not have run,' she said, 'with that great heavy lead and all. If he had had the spirit of a flea he would have broken your back for you. You should not have shown it him; you should have stopped still and gone for his nose. That hurts, and he knows it. He would have run away from you the moment you raised your paw. Remember!'

OUT OF THAT DOG'S WAY
AT ANY RATE.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST JOURNEY

At the end of July Rosamond was taken home by somebody who was travelling up to Yorkshire. Her mother was not very well and wanted her. In fact, for the whole of August Auntie May was always worrying about Beatrice, Rosamond's mother, who was her twin-sister. She said she couldn't quite make out from Beatrice's letters what was the matter with her, or if it was serious or no, and though she paid several visits to big country houses in August she did not enjoy them. We were left to the care of Mary, who was becoming a very excellent cat's-maid, and so mother told Auntie May whenever she came home, and that, although she never could love Mary as much as she loved Auntie May, she had not wanted for anything during her absence.

At last Beatrice's letters got so scanty and

muddly that Auntie May said she must go and see her and find out for herself. So she telegraphed to Tom, her brother-in-law, that she was going down to Crook Hall on Thursday, whether they wanted her or not.

The answer came back, and puzzled Auntie May very much :

'*Do—want—you—bring—kitten.*'

'*Bring kitten?* Why should I? Beatrice doesn't want to keep kittens because she has so many dogs. What can it mean? This is some game of Rosamond's, I'll be bound. I'll *not* take a kitten.'

But the more she thought over it, the more she felt that Tom wouldn't have put *Bring Kitten* unless he wanted one. He is a man who doesn't talk any more than he need, and it was he who had sent the telegram off himself. Beatrice wanted the kitten for some reason or other, there was not a doubt of it, or Tom wanted Beatrice to have a kitten. She began to think she *would* take a kitten.

'I will take the strongest,' she said. 'Petronilla, which do you consider your strongest kitten?'

Mother answered, 'Frederick B. Nicholson, as you call him,' but of course Auntie May couldn't

understand her. She sat down by the basket, where we still spent most of our time, and talked to us about ourselves.

'Freddy's nose is too long—makes him rather snipe-faced—but his paws are broad and magnificent, and his eyes golden. Zobeide, your tail is a weeny-weeny bit too thin and drawn out at the tip, and your ears too pointed and long. You, Loki, have got a tolerably neat little chubby face of your own, but your ears are not tufted, and your nose, if you were human, would be an impertinent snub. Still, you are going to be a fluffy cat, one can see that, and invalids—if poor Beatrice really is an invalid—prefer fluffiness. I think I'll take you, Loki. No, Fred, not you, indeed, you pertinacious darling, for you always go for one's eyes, you are such a dangerous cat, without a single atom of self-control. So, Loki, you may as well say goodbye to your mother and make the most of her, for she just won't know you when you come back. Get him ready for me, Petronilla, by to-morrow morning, will you?'

'So Beatrice is an invalid!' said mother, after she had gone. 'It is bad for you, my child. But now listen attentively to your mother, and perhaps she may tell you how to avoid any bad effects. If

they put you on the patient's bed, keep as near the foot as you can; don't lie near her or take her breath. I always believe in giving invalids a very wide berth. I remember once that my old mistress, Miss Jane Beverley, was very ill, and I had kept away as much as I could. She did not want me either; she didn't *really* love cats. One day, however, I was curious to know how she was going on and I ventured into her sick-room, though it was a foolish thing to do. From what I observed myself, I concluded that she was on the high road to recovery. We know better than They do. It is the air that blows from people that are not going to get better that tells us about it. No such airs came from her. I leaped on to the bed and went right up to her face and stroked her chin. You should have heard her old nurse:

'"Bless us, ma'am," she almost screamed, "you're going to get well. The cat's taken to you again!"

'She was an unusually skilled nurse to know this principle that is so strong in cats, and let her judgment be swayed by it.'

'And did Miss Beverley get well?' asked Zobeide.

'Of course—till next time. They die, you know, like us, in the end.'

Next morning came, and Auntie May was very sad and serious. I believe she was quite frightened about her sister. She had a basket lined, with torn-up bits of paper in it, brought in for me, and at the very last moment I was put into it by Mary. Mother came and sniffed at me as I lay inside, and advised me not to go and get all the skin off my face trying to pick at the walls of the basket to open it, but lie still and try to sleep, and eat a little grass the first chance I got on arriving at Crook Hall.

Then Mary came back into the room hastily. They have got so into the habit of telling us things that she said to mother as she took me up, 'Cab's at the door!' She carried me down, and I suppose it was Auntie May who took hold of me, for I heard Mr. Graham kiss her several times, and I suppose he wouldn't kiss Mary, though he says she is a very good servant. We went out of the door, for I felt the rush of fresh air against the sides of the basket, and I sniffed, and then I felt so terribly strange that I am ashamed to say I did give one long 'Miau!' as I was carried across the pavement to the cab. I saw nothing, of course, but mother had explained to me all the probable stages of my journey.

There began the strangest, weirdest series of noises I had ever heard then, though I have, I am sorry to say, heard them many a time since. Howling, rushing, grating, bumping, rolling, trotting, whistling, screeching, hitting—and spitting, if I may say so. We seemed to be always going up and down stairs. I mewed a few small mews, and Auntie May spoke to me through the walls of the basket and said, 'Hush! hush!' very gently, and I hushed, and only grunted to inform her how I felt.

Then at last all was still, except for a curious rushing noise that never stopped. The rocking motion that went with it was very pleasant and soothing, and made one feel quite stupid. Suddenly I felt Auntie May's hand slide into the basket, which I licked and lay down against. I was quite easy in my mind after that, but getting more and more stupefied every minute. Presently she opened the lid of the basket and I sat up and looked about.

We seemed to be in a small, plain, unfurnished house, with nothing in it but seats and a hat-rack. A large man, far bigger than Auntie May's little papa, was sitting opposite her and reading a sheet of enormous printed paper. In the other corner was a lacy black woman. When the basket was

opened she jumped and frightened me, and Auntie May said, 'Sit still, nervous little cat!'

'Oh, what a darling!' the woman exclaimed. 'May I just touch it?' She did touch me, but Auntie May held my hind paws firmly down in the basket. She needn't have bothered, I don't go to strangers.

'Mightn't he jump out? Aren't you awfully nervous about him?' cackled the black woman. 'Isn't he a sweet colour? He is like that new grey pastel shade they brought out in Paris last year. Teuf-Teuf, they called it—something to do with the automobiles? Why don't you call him Teuf-Teuf? Such a sweet name for a cat!'

'Because somehow he happens to have a name already,' Auntie May said, extra sweetly, because she was so bored by the lady and wanted to read her novel.

'Why doesn't he have a yellow ribbon round his dear neck? A yellow ribbon would look so sweet—so like Velasquez' scheme of colouring!'

'I never allow my cats to wear horse-collars,' said Auntie May, 'for fear of spoiling their ruffs. I think I *must* put you in again, darling, for I want to read. You won't mind, will you, for I will leave you my hand to lick!'

So down went the lid on me, and the lady in the corner calmed down, though she still chirped occasionally like the birds in the square garden in the mornings.

The rushing and the rocking stopped suddenly, and I heard a voice call out 'Darlington!'

'Oh, how sweet!' said the lady in the corner. 'And what are you going to do with your darling cat?'

'Put him on the rails!' said Auntie May, quite rudely. '*Good* morning!'

But we did not catch our train; it had gone. We had missed the connection. '*Tant pis!*' Auntie May said (which means 'All the worse!'). 'We will go and put an ornamental frill round something.'

That meant *eat*, as I found soon enough. She opened the basket and turned me out on to a marble tablecloth, very cold to the feet, and gave me a saucer full of milk. I don't like eating off anything white, for that always means getting banged. Auntie May's way of preventing kittens from stealing off tables is to associate eating off anything white in their minds with a whipping. However, in this case it was she herself who put me up to it. When we had done (Auntie May

ate a couple of sponge-cakes) we went to another room where a woman in grey was sitting over the fire knitting, and Auntie May talked to an old gentleman with black silk gaiters and a black silk pinafore like Rosamond's, who turned out to be the bishop of the town near where Beatrice lived. It was all delightful, except that people kept opening the door of the room and looking in and going away again, making me jump every time, and the bishop too. I *am* a nervous little cat, as Auntie May told the black lady, and I am to Fred as a carthorse is to a racehorse. After we had sat there for what seemed a long time, a guard put his head in at the door and said, as if it didn't particularly matter, 'Anybody here for the four-fifteen?'

It did matter, and everybody jumped up except the grey-haired woman, who went on knitting. Auntie May popped me into the basket, and fastened the lid safely; the bishop offered to carry me, but she would not let him. I was relieved, and I think by the sound of his voice he was relieved too. I did not mew, for it would only distress her and disgrace her before her new friend. Besides, I was full, and you have no idea what a difference it makes. I curled round and

determined to take no notice of any sort of noise. Even when Auntie May prodded me with her finger kindly, I wished she would not, for I felt too stupid to mew, and just wanted to be let alone for the rest of the journey. Besides, I felt rather sick. They should not fill one up with milk like a bottle and then shake one about. I wished I had refused it at the time.

The train slowed down, and the bishop said, 'Can I be of assistance to you in any way?'

'Thank you very much,' Auntie May said, 'but Tom, my brother-in-law, will meet us. There he is!'

Then, I think, she forgot all about the bishop, for she said to some one at the carriage window, in a fearfully excited voice, 'Oh, Tom, how is she? I *have* brought a kitten——'

Tom did not answer, but I fancy he shook his head, or something that didn't seem hopeful, for Auntie May squeaked, 'Oh dear!' in not at all her usual voice.

Tom seemed only business-like. 'Where's your ticket? Hand it over. Had you to take a dog ticket for this little brute?'

'*Tom!*'

'All right. Come on!'

They did not say a word to each other till we had walked a little way and stood about a little, and Auntie May had taken a step up with me and sat down. And then the rolling and rocking began again. I was nearly dead with fuss and different ways of travelling. But I listened to what was said.

'She hardly knew us yesterday,' he was saying. He had a deep big voice, much louder than May's father's voice, but then Mr. Graham is an artist and Tom Gilmour is a sportsman, and is always calling to things across bogs and moors to follow him or come to heel, so mother told me. He went on, choking rather:

'It was a sort of faint. She got quite cold, and the nurse said, "*Anything* to rouse her, sir! I wish she had a pet, sir!" And I was sending for you anyhow, and so I said, "Would a kitten do?" and the woman said, "Might try it, sir." So I sent that message to you, "*Bring a cat!*" Pretty comic, wasn't it? Ho, ho!'

It was a melancholy sort of cackle, but Auntie May cried out:

'Oh, Tom, how can you laugh with Beatrice in such a state?' She began to cry herself and rock about in the carriage.

'Better to laugh than cry with an invalid any day,' said Tom. 'And I tell you what, May, my dear, if you are going to be a hysterical muff, you had much better not have come down at all. You will do Beatrice more harm than good. Stow it, can't you? Good Lord, now there's the wretched brute in the basket beginning to caterwaul!'

I was *not* caterwauling, only trying to tell Auntie May to be quiet and that Tom was quite right. But one is so easily misunderstood. However, Auntie May got sensible all at once, and thanked Tom for speaking sharply to her, and said she meant to do Beatrice good, not harm, and would he like to see the little kitten, and she had chosen the prettiest, and so on.

'If you like you can let the beast out,' he said roughly. 'I look upon all cats as vermin myself. I know I shoot 'em pretty quick when they come into the garden. They are so beastly destructive, you know, worse than rabbits even. Here, yank him out and let's see the little beggar.'

So out I came, and I at once crawled all over his nice great knees, covered with thick lovely wool that I could pick up with my claws in handfuls and not be missed. My claws were little and the stuff was thick, not like the clothes of Auntie May's friends,

male and female. The men squirm when I get on their knees and try to bear it, but the women jump up and squeak the moment you touch them. They have only got one coating probably under their thin muslin gowns, being ridiculously underfurred. But Tom only grinned and said:

'Go it, little 'un! You can't hurt *me*. Beatrice's knitted stockings will stand a good deal. Poor darling! I only wish I knew whether she would ever knit me any more of them!'

'Now *you* mustn't be depressed!' said Auntie May, patting his knees. She was awfully fond of Tom I could see, and he of her, though he abused her all the time, and laughed at her novels and her editors and publishers, and her life in London generally, so different from his and Beatrice's. I was very eager to see Beatrice, because she was Auntie May's sister and Rosamond's mother, but I was not allowed to until after supper, mine and Auntie May's. We had it with Tom alone, and he hardly said a word all dinner, though the nurse came down and told us that Beatrice was much better and hadn't fainted at all that day, and had eaten quite a fair meal at seven.

CHAPTER VII

AN INVALID

AFTER supper, about half-past eight, Auntie May took me in her arms and carried me into a bedroom. A stiff woman was there with a white cap and apron on. On the bed, that was very prettily trimmed and arranged with painted flowers and real flowers all about it, was Beatrice. She had yellow hair trained all over the pillow, tied up with blue bows, and a great many of them. Her eyes were very wide open and sad. She was a very tall woman, for she stretched a good way under the bedclothes. She put out a wretchedly thin sort of claw to take hold of me—she had seen Auntie May before, just for a minute.

'Oh, you sweet, right, absolutely perfect thing,' she said to me. 'May, how did you know that it was exactly what I wanted?'

All this was so fearfully and wonderfully polite

that I made a great effort and conquered my own repugnance to an ill person, and flinging mother's mean counsels to the winds, I let her take me in her arms and fold me up quite close to her, almost inside the sheets, and squeeze me till I thought she would drive all the breath out of my body. At any rate, the poor sick thing was happy, and it is a delightful feeling to be giving any one pleasure like that. I didn't even squeal. She was far too weak to do it again, luckily, but lay quite still with her arms slack, letting me lie on her chest, curled up so that it would take me some time to go away. I think They ought to know that if once you get a cat to curl wherever it is you want him to settle, he has accepted the situation, and there is no fear of his running away for the present.

'Will you leave it with me, May, dear? Will it stop alone with me without you, do you think?'

'Oh, it is very young, it hasn't learnt to love *me* yet!' Auntie May said hastily. 'It will stay with you all right—that is, if nurse permits it.'

She raised her eyebrows at the nurse and the nurse nodded.

'I can't say I approve of cats in the sick-room, Miss,' she said in a low voice while Beatrice was

fondling me, 'but for this once—and it seems to have done her so much good, too!'

Auntie May said, 'You see, we are all like that in our family—perfectly mad on cats. It is only because my sister lives in the country, where cats are so apt to go a-hunting and get killed, that she doesn't have the house full of them. You see, I know how she feels, as I am her twin sister. Now I will go and tell my brother-in-law of the success of his prescription.'

Before she left the room she bent down and whispered to me:

'Be a good boy, and stay behind willingly, and don't come squealing after me the moment the door shuts behind me, or I'll never forgive you, Loki, so just you mind!'

'What are you two mumbling together?' asked Beatrice pleasantly. 'I won't have any secrets. I want Loki's undivided allegiance, please.'

So I stayed with Beatrice all night, and the nurse most officiously stayed too. There was a sweet little dancing light on the mantelpiece that I could not take my eyes off, as it flickered over the edge of its silver dish. Beatrice never seemed to sleep. The nurse fed her twice—once it was cornflour, for they gave me the remainder of it.

The nurse was kind on the whole, but rather contemptuous. I told mother about her afterwards, and mother said nurses always were contemptuous —that is, if they were any good. The coaxing, sweet-spoken ones never got any authority, and usually were changed in a month.

This one didn't mind showing that she thought Beatrice an utter fool to want to keep a grey kitten with her day and night, but she had seen so many invalids she was never surprised at anything. When she was not nursing Beatrice, she sat and made herself stiff white calico aprons, and broke a needle over every seam. She took me down to Auntie May for my meals, lifting me very gently, as if I had been a 'case'; but she hadn't the slightest idea where my bones came, as Auntie May did—I could tell that from the way she carried me.

I saw *her* having her meals once. She crooked her little finger over the handle of the teacup as she drank and stopped between each mouthful, and when the parlour-maid, who waited on her very crossly, asked her if she would have another helping of mutton, she answered, 'Thank you, I have sufficient,' and to the same question about her beer, she replied, 'Not any more, thank you!'

It was while I was in Beatrice's bedroom that I first saw myself in the glass. I thought it was another cat at first. I kissed it, and its mouth was very cold. Then I lifted my paw to shake paws with it, as it seemed so anxious to be friends. It did exactly what I did. This was unsatisfactory somehow. I got cross, and dabbed at its paw with mine; and then I got crosser still and dabbed just anywhere all over the place, and it seemed quite as furious as I was and dabbed too. I should have gone on for ever if Beatrice hadn't asked what that scratching, pattering noise was? The nurse answered, 'The cat sees himself in the glass, Madam,' in the little stiff voice she had.

So that was all, and I was very much hurt at having been made such a fool of, and what is more, I did not believe it. It *was* a ghost.

Some cats believe in ghosts, some don't, mother told me. She herself sees them. I longed to get home again and compare notes with mother. What I saw may have been the ghost of Great-Uncle Tomyris, whom I am supposed to resemble. I sometimes went and exposed myself to him again, but not too often; I had a shy feeling about him. I simply detested being held up to a glass to see him, as Auntie May sometimes chose to do,

with great want of tact. I would not fight him, or even touch him; why should I? His nose was awfully cold, and sent a thrill through me, as of one who comes from another world.

Beatrice got slowly better, and I got ill. They did not feed me right, but brought me remains of sticky, greasy made dishes with queer flavours that would disagree with any cat. We like to live very simply, and I was little more than a kitten. But I *had* to eat something to keep body and fur together, and yet what I did eat did not nourish me, and only did me harm.

'His little stomach is like a drum,' Beatrice said sadly. 'He has got indigestion. What could you fancy, my pet, my sweet? I wish I could guess and I would give it you.'

I wanted a piece of plain lean beef, minced for preference, or shredded, but I knew cooks didn't like setting the mincing-machine in motion '*for a cat!*' so I supposed I should not get it, though I knew Auntie May had ordered it for me. It is funny how people, inferior people, think a cat can eat anything. Auntie May always takes in the butcher by not allowing the cook at home to send for 'pieces for cats.' If you mention that it's for a cat, she says, the butcher or the

fishmonger always wraps up the meat or fish in newspaper, she has noticed that particularly.

I wished she would go into the kitchen and blow up that cook. She was so bothered about Beatrice that she was not herself, and seemed to have forgotten me, in spite of her loving words when she came across me on the stairs or anywhere.

Beatrice had massage, and she knew how it was done and she gave me some, which relieved the pain a little. She used to rub my stomach gently for half-an-hour together, and when I at last got well she was firmly persuaded that she had cured me. I knew better. It was Tom.

Tom never took much notice of me, but once when he was leaning over Beatrice's bed she told him that I was not well.

'Poor brute,' said he, 'I should like to know how it could be well! Fed on messes and deprived of exercise! No dog could thrive on a regimen like that, and I suppose a cat is put together something after the same fashion.'

'But,' said Beatrice, 'how can he have exercise, Tom? They tell me that there were two degrees of frost the night before last, and the garden is a mush, and the grass all white with rime!'

'No matter, that's what he wants. Look at him!'

I had risen and gone across to the window to try to signify to Them that I agreed with Tom, who added, 'The poor little beggar knows what is good for him.'

'It isn't good for him to wet his little silver feet,' said Beatrice.

'I bet you it wouldn't hurt him. Be as good as a Beecham's pill to the little fellow,' said Tom, who was getting quite excited over his idea. I was leaping about, alternately rubbing myself against the window and then against his knee. 'Look here, Beatrice, I'll take him out. I'll take the responsibility.'

'Do what you like, Tom, but whatever you do don't let May catch you.'

'May is in the dark room, developing some photos. Come on, you kid!' He lifted me as nicely as Auntie May could; his hands were enormous, and one of them seemed to swallow me all up, and hiding me under the lapel of his coat, he slunk downstairs with me, chuckling all the time. He opened the hall door, carried me across the gravel, which was soaking, and dropped me on to the lawn.

Wow! but it was wet! I stood a moment undecided, but then I saw that good Tom on the other side of the patch of grass dangling something in his hand. My courage came to me and I darted across, squelching out wet at every step I took. Tom, of course, wasn't at the other end when I got there, but at the place I had just left, still waving the enticing thing, whatever it was. I scuttled after him, and we played that game three times, and I felt like a new cat. The fourth time he stayed, and let me get hold of the object, which was nothing more than an old leather bit of strap that he punished the dogs with, and when I had got my teeth well into it, he caught me up by it and carried me back to Beatrice.

'Here's your precious cat! Now dry his feet and polish them up for all you're worth; put a shine on them, if you can'—he handed her a towel—'and don't leave a wet hair on him.'

I was all right after that. Also the rime went off the grass, and it was rather fine for October, and they got into the way of letting me go out a little regularly. Auntie May protested, and said it had never been done in our family, but Tom assured her it could do me no harm if I

was brought in and not allowed to sit about with damp feet. I simply loved Tom, for it was he who cured me far more than the massage, and got me leave to run about in the garden and try to catch things.

I never caught anything, but all sorts of things tried to catch me. Once it was three thrushes that hunted me across the lawn in front of the drawing-room windows, and a strange dog once strayed in, attracted by the sight of me, and I should have had a bad time, only that Beatrice always took care to have a window left open somewhere on all the sides of the house for me to fly in to in case of need.

The *house* dogs had all been introduced to me and told to leave me alone, and they jolly well obeyed. Beatrice said she never could have believed that they would have tolerated me as they did. They not only tolerated me—I saw to that myself, for I very soon began to lord it over them and take any seat I fancied, even though it had been Peg's or Meg's before — they got to treat me as gentlemen treat ladies, moving out of any nice place when I approached, and never thinking of going out of a room before me. We could not understand each other in the least, and I

have often wondered why, since I can understand Beatrice and Auntie May, and all the big ones so well. The dogs make absurd noises and bark, but perhaps it means nothing, and they only *think* they are talking! Anyway they are not nearly such conversational creatures as cats; they often get through a whole day without uttering a sound. Now I can't even enter a room without making a remark, and when anything has happened to me I come in and tell Them, forgetting They can't understand me. Auntie May always listens politely.

'What is all this you are trying to tell me?' she said, when I came in one day full of the adventure of the tame rabbit which had insulted me. Kitty had brought it out on the lawn to be introduced to me and we had just rubbed noses, when it suddenly turned round and tossed up its heels, all over mould, in my face and scuttled off. Ill-bred thing! I tried to tell Them, but it was no use. Rosamond said, 'What is it all about, little talking cat? Auntie May, just listen, he is bubbling away with conversation, and most awfully interested in himself and what has happened to him. I *wish* I could understand.'

CHAPTER VIII

A MAN WHO HATED ME

Up to now I had been kept as much as possible with Beatrice; but when she was better and able to come down, I realised that there were three children in the house—my old friend Rosamond, of course, and two others, Amerye and Kitty, whom I had hardly seen at all.

Heaps of people kept cropping up. There was Miss Grueber, their governess, and Annie, their schoolroom-maid. After Beatrice had been downstairs and 'on the sofa' a week, her mother-in-law, Tom's mother, a Mrs. Gilmour, came, and I scratched her.

She made the most fearful fuss, and I am ready to declare that my claw was not shot out with any degree of violence, nor did it penetrate more than the eighth of an inch into her hand. But she said her arm would mortify. She complained of a

twisting sort of pain reaching up as far as her elbow, and wore her arm in a sling to keep the blood out of it. She said there was poison in cat's nails as well as in that of human beings, only their nails don't affect you unless that human being is in a rage. She went about with a 'poor-poor' face, and requested that I might be removed if I happened to be in the room when she came into it. I often hid when she was there, for though I disliked her and would not ever go near her again, or play with her bobbly fringe or the ends of her fur stole, I found her amusing and liked to listen to the absurd things she said and the stories she told, although I hardly believed them. She said she herself was indifferent to cats if they didn't come near her, but there were people who fainted away if a cat came into the room where they were. That I afterwards had reason to know was true, for it coloured my whole life.

One day Beatrice was downstairs lying on the sofa in a sweet lace thing with lots of fascinating frills to play with. I refrained because she had been ill. She told us she had put on this lovely *négligée* because Mr. Fox was coming to tea.

'Who is Mr. Fox?' asked Auntie May.

'Oh, a very nice man who has taken Shortleas

this year. I don't know where he comes from—London, I suppose—but I met him somewhere before I was ill and found we were neighbours—if you call five miles apart neighbours—and thought we might as well be civil to him. I asked him to tea while you were here—I thought perhaps he might like to meet a London authoress.'

Auntie May looked cross, as she always does when they talk of her books, which she doesn't think much of, only they bring her pocket money, and as Mr. Graham is always spending his on old silver and enamel, it is important to her. Then as it was still quite early, and Mr. Fox wasn't likely to come till tea-time, Beatrice civilly asked Mrs. Gilmour to play something to us.

Mrs. Gilmour said she wouldn't, at first, but Beatrice worried her to do it, knowing that she meant to in the end, and at last the old lady opened the instrument, as she called it, and began.

In all my life I never heard anything like it! The old thing's gnarled fingers hopped and skipped and jumped and rattled about like hailstones, and the notes bobbed up under them as if they were alive. I longed to catch them, but I dared not go any nearer to the terrible noise.

'Lovely!' murmured Beatrice, closing her eyes.

'Sweet!' said Auntie May, pegging away at her fancy work that she wants to get done.

I felt perfectly sick, and as if my inside was being pulled right out of me. I should have died if I couldn't have run away and hidden myself somewhere. Down, down went my tail, as we cats always put it when in trouble, and I crept under the Chesterfield sofa, wishing only that my ears had been smaller and did not let the sound in so much.

'I love the minor key,' said Auntie May, and then I knew what it was *I* disliked so much.

Presently there was a scrunch on the gravel outside; not a cart or trap scrunch, but a motor scrunch, which is quite different. Auntie May gave a pat to her hair, and Beatrice a tug to her skirt, and whispered to Auntie May in fun:

'Now mind you don't shock him, you wild London girl!'

Mrs. Gilmour must have heard the scrunch too, but she went on playing louder than ever, only jumping up with a little mew of surprise as the door opened and Barton announced: 'Mr. Fox.'

I could see Mr. Fox by lifting up the edge of the valance of the sofa with my nose, and I took a good look at him. He was very tall, and very

dark-haired, and stooped a little. I dropped the edge of the valance again, for it was tiring, and I could tell things about him by using my ears—for instance, that he was a very shy man.

He was, of course, introduced to Auntie May, and for the rest of his visit he sat staring at her. I guessed this from the direction of his voice when he spoke. Mrs. Gilmour talked to him most, and all about the poor, and why they want a three-roomed cottage instead of a two-roomed one.

'I should think every family wanted a spare room,' said Auntie May, 'to stow their mother-in-law—or the cat.'

'Don't be flippant, May,' said Beatrice, and Mr. Fox seemed to be wriggling on his chair, for it creaked. I suppose he didn't like her to make fun of mothers-in-law; but if his was like Mrs. Gilmour, it would be difficult to help it.

Presently I looked out and saw that he had pulled his handkerchief out and then didn't seem to know what to do with it. Very soon, however, he began to put it to his mouth and I could hear him gasp.

'Do ring, May,' said Beatrice. 'I can see that Mr. Fox is dying for tea after his long drive.'

'Not at all,' Mr. Fox blurted out. 'Not at all. I never take tea, I——'

'Have a brandy and soda, then. Tom always does.'

'Mr. Fox looks quite pale,' said Mrs. Gilmour.

'The fact is,' said Mr. Fox, and his voice trembled, 'I am not very—I am afraid I cannot stop for tea to-day.'

'I am afraid you are not well, Mr. Fox. Last time you came I had the pleasure of pouring you out a very strong cup.'

'I know,' mumbled poor Mr. Fox. 'The heat'—it was drizzling snow and sleet at that very moment—'I want air. I feel I must leave you; the truth is, I am so unfortunately constituted'—here he simply gasped. 'I am convinced that there is a cat in the room.'

'There isn't, that I know of. But if there was——'

'I am sorry to say I am sure of it, from my ridiculous weakness. I have been subject to it from childhood. I cannot breathe—I feel positively faint if one of those animals is anywhere in my neighbourhood.'

'May, if your wretched cat is hidden under the sofa—hunt it out quick, or poor Mr. Fox will faint!'

'Please don't disturb your pet for me,' said poor Mr. Fox, politely. 'I had much better go. I am quite ashamed of myself.'

But meantime Auntie May had lifted up the valance of the sofa, and I had walked out, given Mr. Fox one look, and sought the door which Auntie May opened for me respectfully. No vulgar shooing for me! She followed me out and took me in her arms.

'Never mind, you sweet little innocent lamb that never did harm to any one. Never mind what the silly man says. Go and have tea in the schoolroom, and behave, and don't get schoolroom manners, please — remember you are a drawing-room cat, and behave as such.'

She opened the schoolroom door and shoved me in; she seemed in a great hurry to get back to the silly weak sort of man.

I knew what she meant by schoolroom manners. Nobody could behave better than Rosamond, Amerye, or Kitty sometimes. When they were allowed to have tea in the drawing-room they made it a point of honour to be quite different, but in the schoolroom they had an idea that it didn't matter. They clawed large chunky slices of bread off the plate and buttered them with the

butter-knife up in the air, as they weren't allowed to do when Beatrice was there, and drank 'giant drinks' till their cups were empty, looking at each other over the rim all the while and trying not to end with a sputter, as a syphon does.

Kitty, the youngest child, was still shy about speaking when she was told to, though she could rattle away twenty to the dozen when not invited to give her opinion, or even when told to shut up.

This very day she gave us an example of her particular kind of obstinacy. She badly wanted some more cake and didn't want to ask politely for it, because that would be letting Fraülein know that she *did* want it.

Fraülein knew that. She said:

'Now, Kiddy'—that was the way she pronounced Kitty—'you can have that piece of cake as soon as you say, "Yes, please." Kiddy, do you want it?'

Kitty nodded.

'Well, you can have it if you will only say, "Yes, please," and if you won't say, "Yes, please," Kiddy—well, then, you can go wizout.'

Kitty began to cry gently.

'You little silly,' said Rosamond, 'if you really do want the bun, why can't you say what you are

wanted to say? What is there in it after all? Yes please, yes please, yes please—I can go on for ever.'

'Pray don't,' said Fraülein. 'Now, Kiddy——'

'I *will* say it, Fraülein, I *will* really,' Kitty cried.

'Well, then, say it.'

'I can't.'

'Very well, then, go wizout.'

Kitty began to turn on the waterworks and Rosamond pinched her severely.

'I *am* going to say it; take away your hand,' declared Kitty at last. So they held out the plate to her and said solemnly, 'Will you have this bun?' and Kitty sold them all a good deal, for she opened her mouth and said:

'No, thank you.'

That was exactly what a cat would have done in her place.

That child is like a cat in some other ways, she spoils property. I don't suppose her teeth meet in things exactly, but her fingers are as sharp as claws any day. When Auntie May came in a few moments later, having got rid of Mr. Fox, I heard some more about Rosamond's famous doll Wilhelmina.

It appears that Kitty had once had a delightful toy, an old woman who lived in a shoe with her ten children, and that after she had had it a month Kitty undressed all the children and stripped them to see if any of them had measles or not. She then lost their clothes, or used them for something else, painting rags, I believe, so the old woman had to keep all her children in the toe for decency. We talked about the old woman for a long time, and then—I suppose Auntie May had forgotten about the fate of the doll, for she turned to Rosamond and asked her what had become of Wilhelmina?

To my great surprise Rosamond, who is thirteen and hardly ever cries, burst into tears and spilt all the tea out of her mouth on to the tablecloth.

'Wilhelmina died,' said Kitty hastily. 'Poor thing!'

'Don't *you* pity her, *you* murdered her,' sobbed Rosamond. 'Oh, Auntie May, she broke her and pulled her all to sticks and streaks, and she had been all through scarlet fever with me——'

'And she had been *defected*, she had,' said Kitty, tremendously interested.

'Shut up, you snake!——which left Wilhelmina weak and easily breakable, and so when Kitty got

hold of her she just sighed and came in pieces. I have never minded anything in my life so much, and Kitty never even said she was sorry.'

'I'll make her,' said Amerye, taking part in the conversation for the first time. 'Come along with me, Kitty, and I'll *make* you sorry!'

Tea was over and she marched Kitty into a corner, and Auntie May said she would give Rosamond a new doll if she really cared so much.

'Not now,' Rosamond said. 'I am rising fourteen now, as Daddy says, and the next doll I have will have to be a real one. No more make-believe children for me, thank you!'

'Only tink, Mees,' said Fraülein Grueber to Auntie May, 'what dat dear shild make me soffer! I try very hard to train her mind. I say to her when we are promenading togedder, how you call dis or dat naturlish object? It is what you call the Kindergarten method—teach her her nouns and werbs. Dere are some cows in the field, and I say, "Kiddy, what do you call dose tings?" and Kiddy she answer, "Pigs." I say, "No, Kiddy, not pig, try again," and she say, "Well, den, rooks." Then I get angert, and I say, shaking my umberell, "You make a fool of me, Kiddy, and what are they? Finish!" And Kiddy, she smile sweetly

and say, "Mushrooms." Then I am quite out of myself, and I say, "No tea for you, Kiddy, till you tell me what dose are!" Then she seem a bit worried, and she look hard at the cows and she say, "Monkeys!"

'I take her and I shake her and I say, "Kiddy, no jam with your tea!" and she only reply, "I not care for jam," which is one big lie and she know it. Then she appear all at once to melt and say, "Fraülein, I tell you, because you are so kind," and I say, "Yes, yes, my shild!" all in haste to be friends mit her again, and she whisper in my ear, "Liddle boys!" Then I lose my whole head completely and I whip her toroughly. Here, kom, my own liebchen, my lamb, have you been good and made your apologies to your sisterchen?'

Kitty had just come in again, led by Amerye.

'IamsorryRosamond,' she said, all in one word to show how little she cared. 'Now, Amerye, take me to see your chickens as you promised.'

'I said if Auntie May will come too,' corrected Amerye. And so, to help Amerye to keep the promise by which she had got Kitty to beg Rosamond's pardon (Kitty wasn't allowed near the henhouse because of something she once had done—I could never find out what), Auntie May had to

say 'yes,' and off we all went to the hen-house, although poor Auntie May had only bead slippers on, while Amerye had goloshes. I had no shoes, but Auntie May took me across her shoulder. I did not mind going so long as I was not taken up to those awfully rude rabbits, and I suspected they were somewhere that way; people generally keep all their children's nuisances in one place. But we did not after all go near them, and all I saw was nice hens, and one duck with a beak exactly the colour of Amerye's hair. All his family had been eaten, but somehow he had got left out so long that they hadn't the heart to kill him.

I was glad they didn't put me down among the animals. I didn't fancy that broad bill of the duck's fumbling at me.

Next day at luncheon Kitty scored off Miss Grueber again. Kitty adores chocolate pudding, and when it is there she gallops through her first helping of rice so as to be ready for chocolate.

Miss Grueber, who knew this, said, 'Kiddy, you are done your rice double-quick time. I see you come. *Now* what you want?'

And Kitty said very politely, 'Some *more* rice pudding, if you please.'

That night I was back in the drawing-room

again, on Beatrice's knee, and they all talked of ghosts. I was surprised to hear that Mrs. Gilmour had seen several north-country ghosts. In fact she knew them very well, and said there was no need to be afraid of them, for they never touched you.

Auntie May made her quite angry by telling her that her cat Petronilla saw ghosts.

'Last year,' said Auntie May, 'I took her to Littlecote, the famous Elizabethan mansion that is haunted by Wild Darrell. We had Queen Elizabeth's room, with a stone carved mantelpiece that seemed to overhang the whole room. Pet slept on my bed on the side farthest away from the door. About the middle of the night—I was not exactly sleeping very well myself—I felt her stirring, and I lit a candle, for there is of course no electric light in such a very old house. Petronilla was sitting up in her place, staring out at something near the door. Her great green eyes were round and dilated. She sat staring fixedly in the same direction for quite five minutes——'

'Are you quite sure as to the number of minutes?' asked Mrs. Gilmour, sarcastically.

'I could not help staring too, though I saw nothing but my white dressing-gown hanging on

AUNTIE MAY TOOK ME
ACROSS HER SHOULDER.

the door. Poor Pet saw more than that, I am sure. At last she sighed and took her eyes slowly off, and lay down again and never stirred. I knew by that that the ghost was no longer visible.'

'I am much obliged to you for confounding me with your feline pets,' remarked Mrs. Gilmour. 'And now I think, Beatrice, as I am rather tired, I will say good-night. Miss Graham, excuse my remarking it, but I do think you have cat on the brain!'

'She's offended,' said Beatrice, 'and now she'll cut me off with a shilling. I must say, May dear, that for a novelist you are about the most tactless person I ever knew.'

CHAPTER IX

MY FIRST MOUSE

MRS. GILMOUR was never very nice to Auntie May after that. She began to be nasty again at breakfast. Auntie May was reading her letters, and one of them was from Mrs. Dillon.

'"Admiral Togo," Auntie May read out, '"*is the chief joy of my life.*" Oh listen, all of you, for you will be so much amused; I am not, for of course it seems to me the obvious and natural thing to do. "He is coming with me to my winter quarters in South Africa."'

'And Mr. Dillon — is he being left behind?' said Mrs. Gilmour. 'Though after all, what is a husband in comparison with a cat? And she is taking a hired attendant for him, and possibly a chef, and engaging a private cabin for him — of *course*?'

'There isn't a Mr. Dillon,' said Auntie May,

shaking with laughter, 'but as far as the cabin goes, that is precisely what she *is* doing. She says so.'

Mrs. Gilmour looked a little put out for a moment, then she said:

'I don't suppose they would admit the young gentleman except on those conditions. Well, well, if people have absurd fancies they must pay for them. Your friend seems to have plenty of good money to throw away!'

Auntie May said she would send a letter of directions to Mrs. Dillon's maid, to tell her how to feed the kitten on the voyage. Forgetting apparently that Mrs. Gilmour was there still, she went on:

'When medicine has to be given, I prefer it in the form of powders.' Mrs. Gilmour pretended to be interested in order to be nastier afterwards. 'To liquids they close their throats somehow, and it runs out of the corner of their mouths. As for giving pills! Petronilla shoots the pill several feet into the air, and the first thing that tells me she hasn't swallowed it is the noise it makes as it hits the ceiling. Poor Pet! She appears to think it funny.'

'So do I!' said Beatrice, screaming with

laughter. 'I think I see Petronilla, with her Burne-Jones angel expression, staring up to the ceiling to see if she has hit the bull's eye, and you in despair because you can't get the pills driven into her.'

'Has your cat had any *very* alarming illnesses? inquired Mrs. Gilmour, with a very perfidious expression, but Auntie May was quite taken in by her appearance of interest.

'Let me see, Petronilla has had gastritis, and she has once ricked her back jumping backwards, and then she had to have massage——'

'Did it come expensive?' inquired the old lady.

'Yes, very. My cats cost me a fortune. What with their food and their illnesses, etc., what I can raise on Pet's kittens hardly repays me for my outlay.'

'Why don't you keep a nice common underbred kitchen cat that nobody wants to steal? A serviceable beast that can go out in all weathers, and get through the long grass without getting its fur wet and draggled,' said Mrs. Gilmour.

'But as I live in London,' retorted Auntie May, 'where there is no long grass——'

'In London,' said Tom, 'I should say myself that a nice tiler and mouser would be more appropriate.'

'I don't like tilers and mousers or beetlers in my bed,' said Auntie May hotly. 'I should never care to kiss cats that had any horrid pursuit of that kind. And as for mice—do you mean to imply, Tom, that Loki cannot catch a mouse as well as anybody if he had the chance?'

Mrs. Gilmour sneered, and Auntie May got quite pink.

'There are plenty in my carpentering shed,' said Tom. 'Why don't you let him have a try?'

'It's disgusting!' said Auntie May. 'But yet —I can't have Loki depreciated and looked down on. Very well, I will turn him in there for a few hours and give him a chance of winning his spurs, only I am not sure if he does that I shall ever feel able to speak to him again! He has something better to do in life than catching mice, but I won't have him humiliated, and he *shall* show you that he can take mousing in his stride.'

To me she said, 'Now, Loki, do your level best, but only this once, mind. You are not to become a slave to the mousing habit, or let it grow on you. Come along to the carpenter's shed.'

She took me there and left me alone, shutting the door after her. I implored her to stay, but

she said No, that I must go through it alone. At first I cried, but becoming convinced she could not hear me, I left off. I played with shavings for about an hour. It was my first introduction to the fascinating, lovely, curly, crunchy, clean, white things. I could bunch them up in my paws and throw them over my shoulder, and they crackled and twisted when I seized them again as if they were alive.

I had never seen a mouse in my life.

Presently I saw what I should have said were two bright boot-buttons set very near together, side by side, though, not one on top of the other as they would be all down a boot. That roused my suspicions, and I made a wild dash into the heap of shavings whence they peeped out. I can say no more than this to account for what I did. I felt horrid afterwards, not to say rather ill, but at the time I felt nothing but a desire to get that mouse (for, of course, it was a mouse), and lay it at the feet of Auntie May, or, better still, throw it in Mrs. Gilmour's face. I should have died if I had not got it, and I did get it. It *was* a mouse, although I hardly looked. I just put my paws, which are very broad and long, on it and it lay quite still beneath them and didn't move a bit.

I PLAYED WITH SHAVINGS
FOR ABOUT AN HOUR.

I did not know what in the world to do with it now that I had got it safe. I knew that decency dictated that I should eat it, but I had not the slightest idea where to begin, and I suppose, while I was thinking, I let my paws rest on it rather more lightly, and it suddenly got up and walked away!

I could not stand such an arrant piece of cheek as that, so I got it back, with very little trouble, for it had not gone far. In a few moments I loosened my paws again on purpose to see what it would do? Sure enough it walked away again! It began to be a sort of game we were playing, and my blood was up.

It was really rather a cheeky mouse, I think, and enjoyed the game as much as I did. Presently I varied the fun a little and tossed it up and down two or three times in the air, catching it again in my paws. This went on a long time, and I got quite excited, till the last time it came down it lay quite still, and though I waited for it to walk away again as usual it did not make the slightest attempt to get up. I believe it was dead, really and truly, not pretending, but there wasn't a bruise on its body or a hole in its skin anywhere, for I looked carefully. I got bored with it and

caught another. That one I nipped in catching, I suppose, for it died at once. I tried to eat it, but no, I find I don't care for mouse-flesh.

Before Tom and Beatrice came for me I had laid another brown body beside the other two, and Tom said when he saw them:

'One to May! Game little cat! Three in two hours!'

Auntie May hadn't felt able to come, but Beatrice told her all about it.

'He didn't really eat any, May, only tried one. It looked like the inside of a clock somehow.'

'Oh, don't, you pig!' screamed Auntie May, and cried, actually cried, about the poor, dear, dead, darling little mice! I cried too, and promised her I would never catch any more. As a matter of fact, it really isn't a bit in my line. I am not a stable, or a kitchen, or even a carpenter's cat, and mousing is not a fit pursuit for Petronilla's child.

'So Loki has vindicated his reputation!' remarked Mrs. Gilmour, when she heard of what Beatrice was pleased to call my prowess. 'Disgusting little cruel wretch! The principle of cruelty is deeply embedded in a cat's consciousness. Now a dog——'

'What does a dog do to a rat?' asked Auntie May rudely. But Mrs. Gilmour took no notice.

'The dog is a noble animal——'

'I once wrote that out a hundred times in my copy-book,' observed Amerye, 'and I can't write any better now, and I hate dogs because of it!'

'Hush, Amerye, you are rude!' said Miss Grueber.

'A dog has dignity, a cat has only impudence,' continued Mrs. Gilmour, 'and comes when he is called——'

'To dinner, eh?' said Auntie May. 'I never knew a cat that would come when it was called to dinner, even. A cat is at least consistent. A dog is too greedy to wait to be consistent.'

'A dog can be greedy with dignity!' said Mrs. Gilmour. 'I have seen him. And yet he is man's slave—self-constituted.'

'I prefer the independence of cats,' retorted Auntie May. 'They won't be hustled—why should they? It is a mistake to want to enslave them and destroy all their individuality. Dogs simply feed the love of domineering that is implanted in our natures. Men—you even, Tom, the nicest of them—enjoy saying "To heel, sir!" A cat never follows, it goes before, and looks back

and waits for you if it fancies you. It has pronounced likes and dislikes, and is not afraid to show them. A dog will lick any one's hand.'

'And a cat will scratch any one's nose. How do you manage in London, Miss Graham, when you have to go out? Do you confide in all your partners, and tell them that it was your favourite cat that scratched you through thick and thin?'

'Yes, May,' said Beatrice, 'I could not help looking at your neck last night at dinner, and wondering how you managed?'

'That was poor Loki,' said Auntie May hastily. 'He *will* get on to my shoulder and take flying leaps at the electric light globes.'

'I don't see why he need kick off from your neck, though,' said Tom.

'Oh, don't blame his dear spirits!' said that nasty old woman. 'Do you see him now trying to run away with the blind tassel? He will hang himself to a certainty.'

I was sitting on the window seat and playing with the cord. I was not aware that it was attached to the blind, for it was lying quite quietly on the sill when it came into my head that I should like to carry it off to play with. When, having got it well between my jaws, I leapt off

with it, I found myself hanging to it by my teeth, and it gave me a nasty jar.

One thing I noticed, although Mrs. Gilmour was always down on me when Auntie May was there, she was quite different when we were alone together. Then she used to hold out her wrinkled claw and flip her ribbons to attract me, and say, 'Poos! Poos!' as if she wished me to come to her; but I was not quite sure, so I never ventured, though she was not a bad old thing in the main and awfully fond of her grandchildren, and scolded them only very gently for the noise they made every day about six o'clock.

I don't know how it was, but at that time they all lost their heads, and screeched and shouted and walloped about the house like maniacs or cats, with Miss Grueber scolding them, but not in a way to make them leave off. I used to feel quite excited too, and run after their legs, and nearly get trodden on; and Miss Grueber's large flat foot was no joke, I can tell you. Still, it was quite amusing playing Blind Man's Buff and not getting caught. They always put me into their games, and politely caught me when I put myself in the way of the one who was blindfolded. Of course I could not be blindfolded, so they had to let me off being

Blind Man, like Kitty, who never would play fair, but always peeped under the handkerchief.

'Don't be angry with her, she's only a child!' Rosamond used to say, 'and let her go last down stairs, because we are heavier, and might come on top of her.'

They used to come down the stairs helter-skelter on their stomachs, bumping on every step. I used to come down too, but I could not help using my feet, and therefore I ran along by the side of them, and got to the bottom first.

Once Mrs. Gilmour came out of the drawing-room, just as the whole procession landed on the mat at the bottom of the staircase. The noise was deafening. She remarked on it.

'My dear children,' she said, standing at the open door of the drawing-room as they all came tumbling at her feet, 'I tremble to think what your little stomachs must look like! Have you ever seen toast done on a gridiron? And the racket is deafening. Such yells! Have you all gone mad? And the cat too, he makes as much noise as any of you!'

'Oh, Granny,' pleaded Rosamond, very much out of breath, 'please don't mind the row. It's only just after six. Don't you know that children and cats always go a little wild at night?'

CHAPTER X

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

Mr. Fox had a large house-party at Shortleas for a week's shooting, and he asked Tom and Beatrice to come and bring Auntie May, and stay three days. Beatrice wanted to accept, so Mrs. Gilmour agreed to stay and look after the children.

'He doesn't ask Loki!' said Beatrice slily. 'Can you possibly do without him for a week, May?'

'*I* can take care of him,' said Rosamond eagerly, 'and he can sleep on my bed, can't he?'

'And on mine too,' pleaded Amerye.

Kitty said nothing. She knew she wouldn't be trusted to have a cat or anything else on her bed.

'We will take him on alternate nights, Amerye,' said Rosamond, and so that was settled. Beatrice and Tom and Auntie May drove over to Shortleas in the dog-cart. Auntie May looked far sorrier

to leave me than glad to go to stay with Mr. Fox. She has never liked him really since he didn't bear to be in the same room with her cat.

Then the children solemnly took possession of me, and Rosamond prevented them from hugging me and lifting me. She never allowed anybody to do that but herself. She is a domineering little thing. I lived in the schoolroom all day, and went up to bed with them at eight. Miss Grueber went up too with them to their rooms, and they had bed drill. It was very odd. They undressed by drill, they had brushing-teeth drill, they had health-exercises drill. I wondered if they would have prayers drill, but they did that alone, without Miss Grueber, all kneeling down by the side of their beds, and tucking their nightgowns carefully under their toes for fear I were to play with them and distract them, which I certainly should have done, because they were quite pink.

The brushing-teeth drill was very funny. One, pour water in the glass! Two, lid off box of tooth-powder! Three, dip brush in glass! Four, dip brush in tooth-powder! Five, scrub! Repeat five times! Then, Listerine!

They had separate beds, at least Kitty's was not much more than a crib, she was so little. The

moment Fraülein Grueber had gone they all three got into the same—Rosamond's or Amerye's, there was a different hostess each night. Then they babbled for an hour or so, till they fell asleep. They called it an hour, but children always exaggerate, and I don't believe it was more than twenty minutes. They discussed everything, all the things that had been discussed before them, and whispered before them, and said when they were out of the room even—they seemed to have heard and to know everything. Rosamond snubbed Amerye because she had been to stay in London with Auntie May five times, while Amerye had only been three times. They both snubbed Kitty because she had never been to London at all. They found her very convenient, because she was supposed to want to know things, and gave them a chance of talking about London. She knew that, and sometimes teased them by saying that she didn't want to hear anything about the horrid place where she had never been.

Amerye began like this:

'Do you know that when I was in London——?'

'Of course we know. Go on.'

'Well, when I was in London I went to *Everyman*.'

'Were taken, you mean.'

'Went to a play called *Everyman*, and I cried, and Auntie May cried, and Mr. What's-his-name cried. They both said it made them feel so wicked. It didn't make me feel wicked, only sad and hungry.'

'When I was in London,' said Rosamond, 'I went to see Henry Irving as Faust, and I had to go away to the very back of the box.'

'Why?' asked Kitty. 'Petticoat coming down, or sick?'

'No, neither, but because I was nervous.'

'Nervous! Pooh! It was because you were afraid of the devil, you said last time.'

'So I was, till I found out it was Sir Henry Irving, and then I liked him and came back to the front seat again, and fell in love with him——'

'Fell in love with the devil? How could you?'

'Everybody does in London.'

'Now, Amerye, you tell us some more about London,' begged Kitty, whose business it was to keep the balance true between them.

'Well, I went to lunch in a restaurant with Auntie May, and had tournedos—that means turn your back.'

'What to?'

'The fire, of course, till they were done,' said Amerye quickly. 'They were all seamed across in bars. I ate two.'

'And what did you drink?'

'Ah—oh—lemonade. Auntie May had champagne.'

'I've had champagne once—in London,' said Rosamond thoughtfully.

'How much?'

'Half a wine-glassful.'

'And how did you feel?'

'As if I should like to lay my head on somebody's shoulder and go to sleep.'

'That's being drunk.'

'That isn't a nice word to use, Amerye.'

'It is not a nice thing to be,' said Amerye severely.

'Children! Children!' said Kitty. 'Tell us some more, Rosamond.'

'Last time I was in London,' began Rosamond eagerly, 'I sat to grandpapa with Petronilla on my lap.'

'Did you sit still?'

'I did, but Petronilla didn't. She wiggled and wobbled and made my hands simply ache. At last I got a ball of Auntie May's crewel wools to

hold scrumped up into the shape of Petronilla. That was when he was doing my hands. I washed them first.'

'And is it like you—the portrait?'

'I don't know,' said Rosamond carelessly. 'Grandpapa keeps it in a corner with a lot of old easels and things on top of it. He is going to finish it, some day, when I'm altered. Now, Amerye, you can tell us about the Zoo.'

Amerye began in a great hurry, for fear, I suppose, Rosamond took back her permission.

'Well, when I was in London I was always asking Auntie May to take me to the Zoo—teased her, *she* said, and gave her no peace—and she kept putting off and putting off, saying she was too busy. She never seemed able to fix a day. But one afternoon when we were out paying calls——'

'I suppose she left you in the hall then? She did me sometimes.'

'Not often,' said Amerye, 'and if there were children in the call I always went up to them. We got into a bus——'

'Is that a kind of trap?' said Kitty.

'All carriages are traps, but all traps aren't carriages, dear Kitty,' said Rosamond. 'Don't interrupt till the end. Go on, Amerye.'

'We bundled along for many miles and then stopped at the garden gate of a house, and got out and paid a shilling and a sixpence and went in. It was a very railey garden with walks between, and I said, "Is it a long walk up to the house?" and Auntie May said it was. There were some long-legged birds walking in the grass beside us and some deer, but I didn't notice them much, for I was anxious to find out if any children were there. There were several gardeners in livery walking about. Then we came to a cage with some owls in it bobbing up and down——'

'Like that dear brown one,' said Kitty, 'that lived in the crooked tree for three months and then went to the devil, father said.'

'And I said to Auntie May, "Your friends seem very fond of animals," and she said, "Oh yes, perfectly mad on beasts, they are!" Then we went under a low archway, and there we met two lots of children carrying buns, and I must say I thought them very rude carrying away their teas like that. But I said nothing out loud, only I hoped I should be allowed to go up to nursery tea at the house, as there seemed quite a lot of children about, and it would be fun——'

'Now you have gone on long enough,' said Rosamond. 'Tell her what it was.'

'It was the Zoo. For I then saw a camel and a bear much too large for any private house, and I said to Auntie May, "Oh, Auntie May, you have brought me to the Zoo after all."'

'I love that story,' said Kitty. 'And then tell how a man gave you some monstrous biscuits for the bears and Auntie May gave him sixpence. And how then you met a man who was king of the Zoo!'

'Yes,' said Amerye, 'and he gave the bears some Nestlé's milk, and let Auntie May have a baby wolf to hold in her arms. Its mother seemed a very nice collie dog, like Meg. And then—and then'—(Kitty shrieked with delight)—'he went into the cage beside a Snow leopard, a thing just like a large cat——'

It was here that *I* got so excited that I leaped up on to the bed on to the top of them.

'Oh, here's dear Loki! Come up, Loki, and hear about the leopard. Make yourself comfortable, and if you *must* stick your claws in and out, do it where the clothes are thickest, that is all we ask you. Go on, Amy.'

'This man went in and the leopard was asleep

in a corner. He climbed up a sort of tree and pulled its legs.'

'Brave man! Didn't he spoil his clothes and get scolded?'

'Yes, jolly well scolded by his wife who stayed outside. He said it didn't matter, for this little game would soon have to come to an end, for the leopard was getting a big boy now. It came after him rubbing about like a cat, and it lay down all curly, and invited him to play with it, and nipped the edge of his trousers, and he took it up all of a piece, as we take up Loki, and it crowded all over him, but it was happiest biting his legs and his hand. Then it got wilder and wilder and wanted him to roll over too, and he got frightened and he came out, and his wife dusted the sawdust off him.'

'Is that all the leopard?' asked Kitty.

'Yes, that is all. I wish there was some more for Loki's sake. I must not tell you about the kangaroos with their children in their pockets coming hopping across the ground up to us, it will bore poor Loki—oh, I'll tell you about the cat-house, where I saw the very king of cats that lived in Egypt and was praised.'

'How praised?' asked Kitty.

'Why, put on a high chair and said prayers to.

That's praised. The man and Auntie May were talking about them and saying that they were an ugly breed of cats to be set above all the others—why, Kitty, you're asleep! You *are* rude!'

'No, I'm not,' said Kitty. 'I am only pretending.'

'Nonsense! You sound all bunged up with sleep,' said Rosamond, in a queer smothery tone. 'This is my bed and I want it myself. Hoof her out, Amerye.'

'I'll go of my own self,' said Kitty, 'because you're both getting dull. Good-night, you *un*-lovers.'

She slipped out and went back to her crib.

'I *am* rather tired, I see,' she said as she climbed in, dragging her legs after her. (I was too tired myself to go after them.) 'I'm a bit good-for-nothing, like mother. Good-night.'

Rosamond and Amerye had a fight as to which of them should have *me*, but I settled that by slipping away and finding a nice high undraughty place on the chiffonnier. They always absurdly imagine we want a bed. As it was quite dark, and they weren't allowed matches, Rosamond and Amerye gave up all hope of finding me, and went to sleep, and snored, a sound which is more like our purring than anything else I ever heard.

CHAPTER XI

THE SURPRISE THAT FELL FLAT

It was the day that Auntie May and Tom and Beatrice were to come home, and the children were very anxious to welcome them in some special way. Welcoming always seems with children to mean doing something they like, and that the grown-up people are not likely to like, and this is exactly what happened.

They told Mrs. Gilmour a little about it, but not all, and asked if she did not think dressing-up was the best way of welcoming father and mother. It is extraordinary how naughty old ladies can be, far worse than children, when they give their minds to it.

Mrs. Gilmour suggested that they should all take off their skirts to begin with, and appear in their blue serge knickerbockers, and then she would see what could be done. Rosamond dirtied

her face and put on a large tattered hat with no regular brim, and let one stocking fall down to show her knee, cut on purpose, and she said she was a backwoodsman out of Jules Verne. Kitty had already rather short hair, and she cut it shorter herself, till in five minutes she looked exactly like a badly barbered boy. Mrs. Gilmour let her. Did I not say she was a wicked old lady? As for Amerye, she disappeared, and I heard that she went into the housemaid's pantry and got her box of black lead and blacked herself all over with it, imitating the sweep in the *Water-Babies* who went to sleep in little Ellie's room. She then went and lay down in Beatrice's pretty bed. Mrs. Gilmour never missed her; she was so busy knitting me a pair of socks—one could hardly call it a pair, Rosamond said, the only thing to do was to call it a quartette. I wished to oblige and share in the nice surprise they meant to give Beatrice, so I kept them on, all except one; for I had to have a hind paw left free ready to scratch myself with, and took up my place on the hall mat about the time Auntie May was due. I always wait for her.

At last we heard the noise of wheels. Rosamond got behind the door, and Mrs. Gilmour stood with

her hand on Kitty's shoulder, who looked truly hideous, and waited, all on the broad grin.

When the trap drove up there was only Auntie May in it, the others had stopped at the east gate to speak to one of the foresters. So Auntie May had the surprise all to herself, and she seemed more surprised than pleased. She got out and cried out:

'They've sent me on to order tea. We are all frozen. How are you, Mrs. Gilmour? Who is that boy you have got with you?'

'It is a little boy I borrowed to keep me company while you were all away,' said Mrs. Gilmour, running her hands through Kitty's hair.

'What a queer-looking child! Looks as if he had water on the brain!' Auntie May said in a low voice, but Kitty heard.

Then Auntie May took *me* up in her arms and mumbled me, and kissed me. 'Sweetums! Didums! Who's been making a fool of you with your red socks? Poor lamb, get out of them at once. I see they worry you. Mercy, who is this?' as Rosamond bounced out at her. 'Rosamond, what an object! Have you been gardening? You *are* filthy. Don't come near me until you are cleaned up, please. You seem all to have quite gone mad. But never mind, so long as we get a

cup of hot tea. Here's Beatrice at last. Beatrice, I have ordered tea. I simply couldn't wait!'

Those idiotic children rushed off to the schoolroom in a body and howled. Kitty had cut off her hair so that her own aunt did not know her, and the chances were that her own mother wouldn't either, she thought. In fact, the surprise had been a horrid failure. I could have told her that her own mother would know her fast enough if she *chose* to, and would, moreover, punish her well for having cut off her own fur like that without waiting for the barber, who comes once a month to barber them all properly.

Sure enough, there was an awful to-do, especially when they found Amerye playing sweep in her mother's nice clean bed with pink hangings. Kitty and Amerye were sent to bed without any supper except a bit of dry bread, and Rosamond, not having done anything particular to herself—trust her not to make herself ugly!—was scolded for having allowed Kitty to cut her own hair all crooked across the forehead. Only Mrs. Gilmour, the grown-up lady who had helped it all on, got off without a scolding, as they always do.

I was scolded for one or two little things I had done while Auntie May was away, and especially

for the packet of tapestry nails or pins, whatever you do call the horrid things that I shall never see again without a shudder and feeling myself all over.

'I tell you what, May,' said Beatrice. 'I am resigned to Loki's passing his nose over everything, reading postcards and docketing bills and superintending the post generally, but when it comes to opening my parcels for me, I do think it is too much. There were, I believe, a thousand nails in that packet he demolished. I can't fag to count them over now, but if their number is incomplete, I should say that the balance was in your cat's stomach. *He* knows, probably.'

I did *not* know, they were such trifling, two-penny-halfpenny things that one of them might easily have stuck to my tongue in turning them over. The dread saddened my last days at Crook Hall.

On the whole it had been a very pleasant time. They had made me quite one of the family, allowing me to share their meals, their pains, their scoldings, and their games. No one could beat me at romps, but in the six-to-seven, when they played card games, I was a little out of it. There was the 'Kings of England' that Auntie May and Beatrice

always quarrelled over, and the 'Flower Loto' in which Auntie May, not being a country person, seemed such a muff, and the 'Towns' game where Rosamond was such a dab because of her good memory, and the 'Pictures in the National Gallery' which was the one Kitty liked best. She was pretty quick, but she made such a hash of the pronunciation of the names of the pictures that the others laughed at her, and yet she generally won. She would say, very politely, because she knew she could not pronounce it:

'Will you give me please, Rosamond, the Fighting—oh dear, I can hardly pernounce it—the Fighting Temenare, by Turner?'

'The Fighting Temeraire, I suppose you mean, Kitty,' Rosamond would reply chillingly, not even troubling to say that she hadn't got it. 'Infant Samuel, Amerye? Look sharp!'

'Ain't got him, my dear child. Kitty, Infant Samuel?'

'Not at home, I regret to say. Rosamond, will you, if you please, give me Dignity and *Imperence*, by Landseer, unless it is the one I see you have just let fall into the *wasperbasket*.'

'I can give you Dignity,' said Rosamond, forking it up out of the wastepaper basket, where, sure

enough, it was where Kitty said it had fallen. 'And you have got the other, haven't you, already?'

'They *do* go together,' said Kitty, not seeing that Rosamond wanted to snub her. And that's the way they went on.

It was lovely, and I could have stayed there for ever, only at home Auntie May's papa was growing impatient. He wrote to Auntie May continually, to ask why in the name of wonder, if Beatrice was better, Auntie May didn't come home. He said slily he thought the maids were getting into bad ways, and didn't prepare the cats' meals properly, and that Petronilla was pining, and that her two kittens had ceased to obey her, in fact were becoming unmanageable.

He asked who this Mr. Fox was, and seemed to think he was the reason Auntie May didn't come home. I could have told him better than that, for whenever Mr. Fox came Auntie May said, 'What a bore! I shall have to shut poor Loki up. You hate the nasty man, Loki, don't you?'

'One tame cat always resents another,' said Mrs. Gilmour.

'Ah, do they? We shall be going home for

Christmas,' said Auntie May, 'and then Mr. Fox will be able to breathe freely.'

'He lives in London in the winter, I believe,' said Beatrice.

'Well, London's wide. He won't need to run up against Loki and me any more, unless he likes,' said Auntie May, and she packed up her trunks (I know of nothing more delightful to sit in than a trunk on crackly paper, until you are turned out) and back we went.

I had become quite a good traveller by this time, and had my system. That is to lie quite still, curled round, to let nobody or nothing disturb you, and not to be persuaded to look out of the basket for love or fish till the train rushes through the tunnels into King's Cross station.

CHAPTER XII

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

THE moment we arrived at No. 100 Egerton Gardens Auntie May, finding out that her father had just gone round to his club, rushed upstairs to find her family, while I trotted at her heels, and screamed out before she had used her eyes almost:

'Oh, my darling dearest old Petronilla! They tell me that you have been pining for me.'

Mother had her nose buried in a saucer of milk, and waited a moment before she looked up, then she let Auntie May take her in her arms and 'poor-poor' her, and she herself began to purr very prettily, but still there was a good deal of difference between the two greetings. It isn't that mother has no feelings, but that she is good at hiding them. As for Zobeide and Freddy, they were biting each other's heads off at the other end of the room, and took no notice. I didn't want to

distract mother from being nice to Auntie May, so I went up to my brother and sister and spoke to them. But they had no time to listen to me, and their game looked so exciting that I was roped in before I knew where I was, and Fred rolled me over and punched me with his hind legs by mistake for Zobeide. So that was all the how-do-you-do that I got, after three months' separation. As for mother, when she was done with Auntie May, she just gave me a comprehensive lick that seemed to say everything.

Home was delightful enough after that. And then mother's accident came.

Mother is still very playful for her age, and people notice it. You can get her all lengths with a bit of string, and none of us can beat her in a helter-skelter race from the top of the house to the bottom. You hear her bumping on each story like an india-rubber ball. (We could never play this game except when Mr. Graham was out. The old make everything so stiff. Auntie May had no objection.) Sometimes when we felt very fresh we chased mother *upstairs*, which is much more tiring, and it was when we were doing this that the accident happened.

Mother got a good start of us, and Fred was

after her like a wild cat. He soon got close to her heels, and kept it up all the way to Auntie May's room at the very top of the house. The window of that room was open, but Freddy was too wild to see it. He simply chased mother across the room and out of the window, very nearly following her himself, but able to arrest his mad course on the sill just in time. I, too, managed to stop on the floor behind, and I said to my brother gravely:

'You've never gone and chased mother out of the window, Fred?'

He said, 'I am sure I don't know. Where *has* mother got to?' He seemed quite stunned.

Then Auntie May came up, quite out of breath, followed by Mary, to whom she said:

'Mary, I saw something like a streak of silver lightning go past Mr. Graham's room, where I was sorting his collars. Is it possible that it was poor Pet?'

She looked out of the window, and told Mary she could see nothing. Freddy had got into a corner under something.

'Perhaps, Miss,' said Mary, 'she's that mangled as to be unrecognisable! The young girl that fell in my mother's street was taken up all mashed up like——'

Auntie May didn't say anything at all, but just went downstairs to look if what Mary said was true. Nobody thought of preventing me and Fred, so we went along too.

Our mistress first looked all over the yard, where mother, if she really *had* fallen out of the window, was bound to have come down. But there was nothing there. Only there was a little tiny smear of blood on the edge of the tin dustbin. I heard them say so.

Auntie May grew quite pale, and went to the other side of the house that was connected with the common garden. We followed her. There, sure enough, we all saw poor mother hiding under a laurel bush, and shaking like a leaf. Her lip was bleeding. She must have picked herself up when she first fell, and run all the way round by the tradesmen's entrance.

'Oh, mother,' cried Fred, who got to her first, 'what have you been and done to yourself?'

'Hush!' said mother. 'I cut my lip on the dustbin in falling, that's all. Bit my tongue, I think. Don't make a fuss — don't say anything!'

But Auntie May had taken poor mother up very gently in her arms, and felt her. 'Poor, poor

thing! She seems quite dazed—but no bones broken, I think?'

'Oh, Miss, them cats could fall out of Heaven and not hurt theirselves, I do believe. Cat o' nine tails, indeed——'

'Nine lives, Mary. Here, come along in and get me the whisky and a spoon!'

She sat by the fire with mother spread out on her knee, and petted her and stroked her, and poured a tiny drop of whisky and water down her throat. She sat nursing her like that for two hours, mother told me afterwards, for long before that Mary had marched Freddy and me upstairs, holding us like a string of onions.

Later in the day mother was brought up and put to bed, very weak and disinclined to talk. She never scolded either Freddy or me, feeling, no doubt, that she began it by romping with us, and the matter was never discussed again.

I fell out of the very same window myself a year later. It was entirely my own fault and Mary's habit of being too free with her hands. I was quietly sitting on the window sill, watching the fat birds fly past the stone coping, and giving their children walking lessons up the tiles of the roof opposite, when Mary came in to do the room.

'Hullo, Boy!' she said, and put out her hand to stroke me. Now, I always back when people threaten to stroke me—it's a habit—and I backed on to nothing! Over I went, and I remember nothing more till I came down whack on the very identical dustbin that poor mother had cut herself on. I did not cut my lip, but I bit my tongue. I had to pick myself up, for though poor Mary, as she said, set off running downstairs as soon as she saw me begin to go, I got to the bottom first.

'Gracious goodness me! Whatever 'll Miss May say? I've done for myself. Hold up yer head, will yer, and let's see if there's not some life in yer. Oh, you naughty aggravating thing to bleed at the lip so!'

'Wipe it off, can't you, Mary?' I said, and she did so with the hem of her cotton dress.

'You ain't much hurt after all!' she said, when she had cleaned me up. She did not notice that I had got my mouth all lop-sided with breaking one of my long teeth on the right side. I regretted this, for it was unsymmetrical. I was quite able to walk in, and took it easy for the rest of the afternoon on the best arm-chair.

Auntie May was out, so I didn't get any whisky, and when she came in I told her.

'Oh, what a long, long story!' said she. 'And what is it all about? Daddy, he is telling me something that has happened to him as hard as he can—such a piteous tale!'

'He threw himself out of the window, Miss,' said Mary, passing by. Of course I couldn't contradict her, and I didn't want to either, she was a good soul, was Mary, and I bore her no malice. Cats never do, it's your precious dogs that remember grievances.

'I always used to jeer,' said Auntie May to some friends who were calling next day, 'when people said that cats did not hurt themselves when they fall, but now I see they are right. Both mine have had their little experience of this kind, and I am happy to say are not one penny the worse!'

She hadn't noticed my short tooth. I found out at the cat-party how unsightly it was, and what a blemish.

A friend of Auntie May's, who had three beautiful Persians, gave a cat-party, and asked Auntie May to it. It was at four o'clock, refreshments at five, and a dark room provided for cats that would not behave or fraternise. We three had all bows of different colours, put on us for

once, but at the last minute mother shirked it, and hid so that Auntie May could not find her. So she had to leave her behind. The party was not very far off, only across the garden, so she carried us one under each arm.

There were about thirty cats at Mrs. Felton's, and only nine of them were grey like us. There was a ginger cat, with a Roman ribbon round his neck, who took a fancy to me. Freddy could not be parted from a white girl-cat; he likes girls, I hate them. I mean never to marry, but Fred liked female society from the very first. Then there was a black cat who had been on the stage. He said he had been very much neglected in his youth, and once had been walking about on the tops of roofs till he got too far away from his home, and suddenly found himself, on jumping down some steps, or ladder, or something, in a great wide covered place, with people on it, shouting.

They all stopped when they saw him, and a man with a stick rapped it and said 'Attention—please, ladies *and* gentlemen.'

He was the business manager, and the black cat had jumped into the middle of a dress rehearsal. The real manager was acting, and he took no notice of the black cat till he was done, and then

A BLACK CAT BRINGS
GOOD LUCK TO A THEATRE.

he wouldn't have it chased away, for, said he, a black cat brings good luck to a theatre. So they fed him, and he lived there, and had perfect liberty to walk about where he pleased. He did go where he pleased, and whether they were acting or not it made no difference to him, he just walked on, so they call it, and smelt their boots, or sat on the ladies' trains, or licked up stage tea-trays if he liked. The reason he was here was that he was the guest of the manager's daughter, who had taken him off the stage because he had brought luck to her father's piece. But he often sighed for the nice merry days.

There were little saucers of milk and warm Ridge's Food dotted about the room, one for each cat. Fred and the white cat, however, chose to drink out of the same saucer. Some of the cats would not stay to be spoken to, but slunk under chairs, and one nice tom hissed and spat. I did feel so ashamed of him. He was left severely to himself while the games were going on, and I was so sorry for him that I went and spoke to him.

'Do you live near here?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said, 'and I wish I was there now. I don't care for this sort of function. I don't see why I should be asked to sit on my hind legs and

talk to every idiot who comes up and strokes me and says "Puss! Puss!" I keep thinking of my nice place on the hearthrug at home, and a little tag—what do you call it?—in the hearthrug that I play with. It is worth all these fine toys to me. I would not play with that absurd mouse they are trailing along the ground with shrieks and cries and "Come ons" for anything. It disgusts me. It is too expensive a toy!'

For They held up their skirts and played with us, squeaking and miauling to imitate us. They don't imitate us half as well as the parrot imitates Them, and I am told that is pretty much the same thing. The younger kittens took a polite interest in the toy mouse, but we elders preferred conversation with really sensible cats, and if they would only have left us alone, we might have enjoyed ourselves. Auntie May was as bad as the rest, she would keep trying to make me sit on her knee when I didn't want to, and I had to do it so as not to disgrace her by disobedience.

There was a woman talking to her about the habits of cats, and trying to get hints from my mistress, whom I gathered was rather a boss, about the care and management of 'kits,' as she would call them.

'I am such a novice,' said she, 'a mere beginner. But I shall hope to be showing in a year or so——'

'I never show,' said Auntie May. 'I think it is most unkind, for the sake of a wretched prize that you have to subscribe to furnish, to subject your pet to all those horrid experiences—fleas, frights, colds, and all the rest of it——'

'Oh, but I see you make quite a friend of *your* cats. May I ask if you allow your kittens to sleep alone? At what age?'

'As soon as possible,' said Auntie May. 'I never coddle them or allow them to think of being afraid of the dark.'

'But don't they cry out and rend your heart? That one, for instance,' she pointed to Fred, who was crawling up her at the moment.

'This one!' said Auntie May, stooping to pick up Fred. 'Oh, Fred never cries—he breaks. If I put him to sleep alone in my study, he does what he can to show me that it won't do. Many's the time I have come in apprehensively in the morning and found a mush of fragments of china or glass on the floor. He writes his name in ink across blank sheets of paper, he pulls all my correspondence out of my pigeon-holes and lays it in rows for me to see without labour, he separates

shoes and earrings and gloves and everything that likes to live in a pair. Oh, he is a regular demon, I *must* get rid of him some day.'

'Don't sell him to me,' said the lady affectedly, 'after the character you have given him.'

By six o'clock carriages were ordered. There was a great chivying, and would any one believe that some of them did not know their own cats? Auntie May knew hers, no fear. Some of us had been sick, but the hostess said it didn't matter, as she had put a drugget down to avert the evils of such a contingency. I am not a bit ashamed of being sick any more than Auntie May is ashamed of blowing her nose. It is a perfectly natural action.

We none of us said Goodbye to each other. They never gave us time. Fred and his white cat were really a little sorry to part, but they said nothing, only she gave him a look over her mistress's shoulder which seemed to say, 'I hope we shall meet again.'

I did not want to see any one of them again except the theatrical cat, who was a jolly sort of cheerful beast. I forgot to say there was a Manx cat there, without a tail; its mother had bitten it off in a temper when it was young, I suppose. It

I DID NOT WANT TO SEE
ANY ONE OF THEM AGAIN.

was an awkward creature, and the white cat spat at him and told him he wasn't the only cat on the tiles. He had been making himself very civil to her, but she was a very unconventional young lady, I was told, and if she liked you she did, and if she didn't she wouldn't stop in the same room with you, and thickened all the way down when she was forced to obey.

Auntie May shouldered her own two, and said Goodbye. She did not get a very good hold, and we both of us oozed out under her arm in the square garden, and she was in a terrible way. We teased her a little bit, but we saw the poor thing was tired, so came back to her.

CHAPTER XIII

CATAPUK

ABOUT the spring time, when the grass in the square garden was not so often wet and the birds made more noise there and the nests were more plentiful, Auntie May seemed not so very well.

She always had the hardest knee in the house to sit on, though it was the nicest knee, and now her fingers grew so thin that the rings began to drop off them, and then *we* were accused of having taken them. I believe it was for this reason that she suddenly began to say that she must go away.

'And leave us?' we said, when she told us.

'I don't think I can make up my mind to leave you, dears,' she said, just as if she had understood our remarks, which of course she did not. 'Fancy waking up in the morning all alone by myself instead of being waked by one of you putting

your paw in my mouth! I can't picture it. No, I'll stay here and die.'

'Nonsense!' her father would say. 'You must live, dear, if not for my sake, for the sake of the cats. Let us think of something to amuse you and make you forget your family for a while. Why not go up to see Beatrice?'

'No, I don't want to go and stay with Beatrice.' She and Beatrice were cross with each other just then, I happened to know, and truly Auntie May's temper was not exactly even nowadays. She had been known to say that we got on her nerves, and that there were too many of us. We knew she was out of sorts by that alone.

'Why not try Folkestone with your Aunt Cecilia?'

'An old cat!'

'What about Mrs. Gilmour at Bournemouth?'

'Another!' It was easy to see she was ill.

'Then come with me to the Riviera?'

'That would be lovely, but, dear Daddy, I could not possibly take you away from your Academy picture.'

'Then,' said the poor old man in desperation, 'go to America and read passages from your own works and make a fortune.'

He was at his wit's end or he would not have proposed anything so absurd and improper as that. He said no more, but I sometimes saw him watching her with tears in his eyes.

When her hair began to come out in handfuls she herself agreed that something must be done.

'I think I will go and live in Paris for a bit and study.'

'But, my dear child, you don't know anybody there.'

'That's just the point. I shall change the scene completely and get out of myself.'

That seems an odd and impossible sort of thing to do, but it isn't the first time I have heard people speak of performing this feat. Cats can't, and wouldn't want to, I fancy.

The old man said he couldn't think of allowing it, and she at once wrote for rooms to an address she knew. He said it would never do, and she answered the woman's letter who kept the pension and took the rooms for a month.

Then *we* were the difficulty. She could not think of leaving us to Mary, who was good but careless, and she thought of a certain place she had heard of at Gunnersbury where they boarded cats.

Mother disliked the idea very much, but what could she do? We were all three put in baskets and taken in a cab. Gunnersbury seemed partly country when we got out, but I saw very little, for we were hustled into the house, and our fastenings not undone till we were in a garden with wire cages or houses in it that they called 'cat-runs.'

A young lady in a grey voile frock trimmed with blue ribbons was sweeping one of the wire places out, and she seemed to be no relation to the mistress of the cattery, just a friend.

'I am single-handed just now,' the old lady said. 'My daughter, who helps me, is away, taking King Henry the Eighth to a cat show, but Miss Joldwin —*such* a nice girl, and so well connected!—is good enough to come here and help me turn out the cages twice a day!'

I don't see why because Miss Joldwin was a pedigree-woman she should be too good to sweep out a cattery, but I do think she might have put a pinafore on, and said so.

'Dear little fellow, he is very lively and talkative!' said the old woman to me. 'I know I shall make a pet of you, I shall.'

'Oh, no favouritism, Mrs. Jennings, please,' said Auntie May. 'I should like them all to be kept

together, if you don't mind, as much as possible. They are a very united and loving family. Fred, do leave Zobeide alone! You are nearly murdering her.'

'Pretty little spirited dears,' murmured the woman, and I hated her. 'Come here! Kittie! Kittie!'

I wouldn't come here, and I saw that Auntie May was pleased. She soon after took her leave, whispering to us:

'Now keep yourselves to yourselves, my dears, and though you must be civil to other cats, don't make great friends. I shan't be away long; I feel I shan't be able to stand it. Eat what you are given, and don't have fancies. Don't climb up the old woman. Be civil to her, but no more. Now goodbye, pets—angels—darlings—I *must* tear myself away!'

She tore herself away, and we were left alone in the wire house with a sort of box thing inside where we were expected to retire for the night. It wasn't bad, and the food was excellent.

I cannot tell the clock, and I never know either what time or what day of the week it is, so I cannot say how long we were all together in this cattery. It may have been a month. But one

day (I had been taken into the house, for I was a good cat and allowed to sit on the dining-room woolly rug) I heard a well-known voice in the hall saying:

'No, thank you. There is no necessity for me to see it. I leave the selection of the kitten to you. So long as the animal is ready packed in a basket and so forth, all ready for my servant to fetch and hand over to me at Charing Cross, that will do. Thank you, ten-thirty. He will call here half an hour before. Good morning!'

It was the voice of Mr. Fox.

Mother said, 'It sounds as if one of you was going to leave me! This wretched man seems to have bought a kitten of Auntie May and doesn't even care which!'

'Mr. Fox buy a cat!' I cried. 'He simply hates us; he can't bear to be in the room with one of us. Don't you remember, I told you all about him at Crook Hall?'

'I cannot explain it!' said mother. 'Perhaps he is going to give you to some one? I wish I knew what places one goes to from Charing Cross. But there is no cat's Bradshaw, alas!'

I was taken away by a groom—I smelt his clothes through the basket—next day, as arranged.

We got into a noisy place full of people talking, and I felt myself being transferred to Mr. Fox's hands, and didn't he take hold of the handle of the basket that contained me as if it was a hot coal! I wondered why he didn't put me in the guard's van; but no, he stuck to me and put me down on the seat of the compartment, just as Auntie May did, and then went as far off me as he could go, for I could tell the distance by the rustle of the newspaper he opened, and read fiercely all the way. I learned that we were going to cross the sea from the conversation of two ladies in the same compartment.

'Do you think it is going to be rough, guard? Have you heard what the sea is like at Dover?'

'Like a mill pond, ma'am.'

'Oh, I do hope——' said one.

'I suffer so always!' said the other.

'Not worse than me, surely? Nobody could. I shall die in crossing some day. What is that in the basket? Is it a bird or a cat? I saw a parrot once crossing. I believe it was sick, or was it only imitating the dreadful noise people make? I wonder if cats are sick?'

I wondered too. Not that I mind being sick,

as I said before, and I thought They were making a great deal too much of it.

I didn't like it, though, when we got to Dover, and Mr. Fox shouldered me and carried me down a ladder and on to something that wobbled gently. There was a horrible smell—that was the worst of it—a kind of salt prick in the air, that I didn't like. Mr. Fox handed me to a man, saying:

'Here, take care of this animal for me—you see it is labelled "Valuable Cat"—and look after it till we get to Calais!'

'Ay, ay, sir,' said the man, who smelt of salt too.

This sailor planked me down somewhere, and never noticed me till there was a shouting and a trampling and a hauling and a slowing-down movement. Then the big thing that breathed in the middle stopped, and there was no noise except of voices. Quite a nice rest. The sailor came back and took me up, and put me back into the hands of Mr. Fox, who gave him something he said 'Thank ye!' for, and who then carried me up the ladder himself. I wished I could have seen his face. I am sure he was pale, though perhaps in the strong smell of salt he didn't notice the smell of me so much, and didn't feel so ill. I don't know, for, as I say, I never saw his face.

He never undid me, but sat quite close to me on the rattlingest train I ever was in, far worse than the boat. The two ladies said so. They happened to have got into the same carriage as we did, and from their subdued sort of manner I think they had both been very ill.

'I wonder how the cat got on?' said one in a very weak voice.

'I don't know, I'm sure, nor care,' said the other. Then in a lower voice she said:

'The man doesn't look very fit; he's green. I expect he has had an awful time!'

I wanted to cry out and say, 'You are quite mistaken. That is the effect of *me*!' but of course I couldn't do anything but scrabble about a little on the sides of the basket. They seemed to be eating an enormous luncheon! I had a parcel of fish in with me loosely done up that I could easily have got at, but I never eat on a journey. I make up for it afterwards.

We stopped twice, and people cried out things, but at last we stopped and did not go on again.

'*C'est Paris?*' said one of the ladies, and then I knew that she was half French, and was probably going home. I thought of Auntie May, who I knew was in Paris, but somehow I was quite

surprised to hear her voice—a very thin and weak little voice—speaking to Mr. Fox on the platform.

'Oh, Mr. Fox, I *never* can thank you enough. And you, of all people, who hate cats so, to offer to bring me Loki. Tell me, how did you get on?'

'Very fairly,' said he. 'I do not choose to let this kind of thing get hold of me. I'm all right, thanks, and glad to be able to do you this little service.'

We all walked along—I was carried of course—till we came to some kind of barrier, and they wouldn't let Auntie May pass. She had forgotten to take a platform ticket, it appeared.

'I shall stay here, then,' said she to Mr. Fox. 'You go through with this ticket, and I shall see whether these foreigners will have the cheek to keep me.' I believe she winked. She was so happy at having got me. She made Mr. Fox obey her, telling him to wait for her on the other side, and she sat down on a seat and took me on her knee, and kissed me.

'I shall get well much faster now I have a soft sweet grey cat to cuddle,' said she. 'I wonder how Mr. Fox knew that? And to offer *himself* as a messenger, of all people! I don't believe he had

any business engagement in Paris at all, I believe it is pure philanthropy!'

Presently an official came and argued with her in French. She was very sweet to him, on the principle that a soft answer turns away wrath, and sure enough she worked it, for presently he said sharply, '*Passez, Mademoiselle!*' which means 'Go on.'

Mr. Fox had examined his luggage, and was waiting for her on the other side of the barrier.

'Oh, why did you wait?' she said. 'I should think now I have Loki with me you would want to give me a wide berth?'

'I don't *want* to,' said he, 'but my unfortunate peculiarity is sure to assert its sway over me. Let me, at least, put you into a cab.'

'And shall I not have the pleasure of seeing you while you are in Paris?'

'I am afraid I must not venture to come and see you and risk a scene?' He laughed; he had a nice laugh. 'But will you be very kind, and come to lunch with me to-morrow at Durand's? I go back at night.'

'But,' she said, 'I thought you said you had to be in Paris on business, and that was why you would bring me Loki? That is what Daddy

assured me you said when he told you I was pining for him.'

'I can get through the business I have to do in the morning before lunch,' said he, quite shortly, and whisked us into a cab and paid it, and told the man to drive us to Rue Chauvau La Garde.

Miss Florence Pettigrew—that was the name of the woman who kept the *pension* Auntie May had settled to go to—was a pretty, very little woman, and reminded me somehow of the Manx cat, she seemed shortened somewhere, somehow. She opened the door to us and I heard her greeting Auntie May, and took a dislike to her at once from the basket. I didn't like her any better when I was taken out. I'm sure she had a wooden leg.

'Well, so that's the cat. I hope he means to have good manners in my flat. I don't want my nice new furniture torn to bits, you know, Graham.'

That was Auntie May's surname, but I had never heard her called that before. Auntie May was shown to her room and asked if she would have hot water, but she sat down on the bed and cried, and cuddled me, and said, 'Well, Loki, this is life!'

I thought she didn't like life much just now, when we went in to dinner. Manxie, as I always called her, kept telling us that she had had to get fish on purpose for Auntie May, but she couldn't afford it for herself. No, what she had was three-pennyworth of meat a day for herself, and that was enough for any woman. I thought she seemed more like a Manx cat than ever, with her daily allowance of cat's meat, for she couldn't have got proper people's meat for that price!

Auntie May gave me some fish, but it was so French and buttery that I hated it. I tried to eat it, though, for Auntie May's sake, who looked so pale and ill that I longed to write home to her father about her and get her fetched home. It was unfortunate that Mr. Fox could not stand me, or else he would have come to the house and seen Manxie, and after he had seen her I am sure he wouldn't have approved of Auntie May's staying where she was so disliked. Why, Manxie even leaned across the table once, when Auntie May coughed, and said:

'I am sorry for you, Graham, but I don't like you. I don't like your eyes!'

Did anybody ever hear anything like that? The woman was mad, that was her only excuse.

Poor Auntie May was miserable and her eyes were sunk in and her cheeks hollow, but I don't see that when she was paying Manxie ten francs a day that she ought to have been abused about her eyes. Hollow cheeks are better than a hollow leg any day.

She went out to *déjeuner* with Mr. Fox next day, telling Manxie about it, who was very cross with her for not bringing Mr. Fox to the flat.

'It is just as if you were ashamed of it, Graham,' she said, and Auntie May didn't contradict her, but shut me up in her room and went. She came back with some nice asparagus heads for me that she had begged of the waiter at Durand's. After that she went out no more to luncheon, and I supposed Mr. Fox had gone back to England.

Then Auntie May began to get worse and worse, and she coughed so that she quite lost her voice and could only call me in a whisper. She had a doctor fetched, to Manxie's great disgust, and he said she had to put her mouth to the spout of a kettle that had benzoin in it, and she used to sit for hours with her lips to the spout till Manxie complained that the steam hurt her ceiling. French rooms are very funny, before you furnish them yourself; there is a mirror let into

the mantelpiece and a stove in the dining-room. They cook quite differently, too, and Manxie's cook used to write poetry. She kept the papers in her biggest stew-pan, and used to read them to Auntie May, who said they were quite good for a cook and far better than her omelettes.

Trivia, that was her name, was so grateful that she was always coming in with cups of *tisane*.

'*Buvez ça, Madame, je vous assure que cela vous fera du bien!*' and Auntie May said it did do her good, but as a matter of fact she got worse and worse, and the doctor said he must get a friend of his to call on her. She was English. He was English. As Auntie May said, 'I come to Paris to change my ideas, and I have an English landlady, an English doctor, and now I am to have an English friend. Funny how we English herd together!'

I may say that I mixed with the French more than Auntie May did. I had a French friend; her name was Mistigris. She belonged to M. Ducrot, the concierge. To call on her I had to seize my opportunity and sneak downstairs when the *bonne* went out to do her shopping and Auntie May was still in bed. Mistigris was generally lying on the silk eiderdown that covers Monsieur and Madame

Ducrot's bed. Their bed takes up half their room, and it isn't very big either. It is close to the door. Madame Ducrot cooks every meal there. They only have the one room and the coal-cellar under the stairs. Their door gives on to the stairs and has a glass window in it, so that they can see whoever goes past. They are a curious race, are concierges, whose business it is to find out things and take tips. At night, when they are in bed, of course the door is fastened, but M. Ducrot has a bell that rings by the bed head, and he has to wake up, if he isn't already awake, and pull a button to open the door. The person at the door going out also has to say, '*Cordon, s'il vous plait!*' All this Mistigris told me. She was very Anglophobe, meaning she hated the English at first, but I convinced her that we were really *des braves gens*—that means a good sort. At first she used to call out 'Angliche!' and 'Poos! Poos!' at me, very rudely, and even sometimes, 'Aha, Rosbif!' but she soon improved. Besides, they don't say 'Puss! Puss!' to their cats here, but Minet or Minette, so perhaps she was only trying to emulate the English accent. Of course I don't know French any more than Mistigris knows English,

but our common language, 'Catapuk,' is known all over the world, so there was no difficulty about our intercourse.

Madame Ducrot did not like my friendship with Mistigris at first, for fear I should run away with her, but I am a born bachelor, and people soon see that there is no fear of my carrying any cat off. Mistigris was pretty, rather prettier than the white cat at the party, but it made no difference to me, we were very good friends and that was all.

Mistigris used to lie in wait for me in the shadow of the bed-curtain sitting on her warm nest in the eiderdown. Talk of French politeness; she never once invited me to come up! And if I happened to get down to see her about meal times when she sat on the table between Monsieur and Madame Ducrot, as they drank their soup and ate their salad, she frowned at me through the glass door and pretended not to know me. I didn't want any cabbage soup, either, their cookery is far too greasy for me. But when she was not so pleasantly engaged and the door of the room was open, she used to come to me and thread herself in and out through the balusters as a sign of friendliness. I never saw her after seven

MISTIGRIS USED TO LIE
WAIT FOR ME

o'clock. They turn all lights out on the stairs here after eight, and I used to sit indoors on the cold wood floor in the evenings and listen for Auntie May to come in. Manxie fed her so badly that in disgust she used to go out and get her dinner at a restaurant. She used to come up, bumping herself in the dark, and fumble for the door-key under the mat, where Manxie, who went to bed at nine to save lights, had left it. There was a jam-pot on a bracket in the hall full of oil and a wick floating in it. It was the cheapest possible way of lighting, so Manxie said. Then Auntie May used to grope for her sealed bottle of milk on the table, and light one of those beastly French matches that smell and sputter, and read her letters if there were any, and then go to bed.

I used to help her to undress, playing with her strings and stay-laces, and anything in the least taggy, and placing her slippers in different ends of the room ready for her to find in the morning. Then when she was in bed, I used to take a header off the high bureau and light on her. She kissed my head for about five minutes and I purred, and then having said good-night to her properly so, I lay down on the lower part of the bed, for I was getting such a big cat that my

weight was too much for her shoulder where I used to like to lie. She put out her hand and stroked me sometimes in the middle of the night; she liked to feel I was there. If she was too sleepy to wake up, I generally crept up and just touched the tip of her nose and so back again without waking her. I didn't attempt to prise her eyelids open, as Fred did once when he had the privilege of sleeping with her. He never had it again. Auntie May values her eyes above anything, and she said it was too dangerous. I never woke her in the morning, for I thought she wanted all the sleep she could get. Manxie used to come and look at her sometimes when she was asleep, and pry into her drawers. I always kept one eye on her, and she knew it. The funny thing is it frightened her, though, of course, she knew that I could not tell tales of her.

At last poor Auntie May stayed in bed altogether, and the doctor brought his friend Mrs. Jay.

She was a nice woman and I adored her, although she played a funny little trick on me. She used to take me up when she came in, and I used to mew.

'It is an odd thing,' Auntie May said to her, after Mrs. Jay had been to see her two or three

times and they were great friends, 'that you love cats so much and yet they mew when you hold them!'

'Isn't it odd?' said Mrs. Jay, smiling. She had a very pretty voice. 'I cannot suggest any explanation.'

I could have explained it. Mrs. Jay bit my neck every time, not hard or cruelly, but just so that I could not help crying out.

She was not a naturally unkind woman, but she had a mania for experimenting on people by teasing them as well as being good to them. She saved Auntie May's life, I think.

She came one day and said very decidedly:

'Now, Miss May Graham, I am going to take you away from here, bag and baggage, cat and cattage. That dreadful Pettigrew——'

'Poor Pettigrew!' said Auntie May in a thin little voice.

'Poor Pettigrew indeed! She is simply starving you, that is what she is doing, and taking ten francs a day for it! I am not going to leave you here a day longer, if I take you away in an ambulance!'

There was no need for Auntie May to go in an ambulance. She paid Manxie, who was in a

towering rage, a month's pay in lieu of notice, Mrs. Jay packed up her belongings, my old basket was brought out again, and we were settled in the Rue de L'Echelle by the evening. I never saw Mistigris again.

CHAPTER XIV

'POOSH!'

THEY had the slipperiest floors in the Rue de L'Echelle, made of pieces of wood joined together and then polished till the nap was like silk. Léocadie, the *bonne*, did it with cloths wrapped about her feet, and she looked too funny and chaseable skating up and down the floors. Sometimes Philippe, Mr. Jay's servant, did it, and he plodged, that was the difference. Léocadie ordered him about like a slave, and he obeyed her, but he chaffed her. She was rather a little slop in her morning blouse and her checked apron and her black frizzly hair, and when she gave him an order he would answer gravely, '*Bien, Princesse!*' which sent Mr. Jay into fits of laughter. Léocadie was very kind to me. She was always holding out some little odd-and-end for me to eat, saying, '*Tiens, Minet?*' while I liked lying on Philippe's

coat, that he took off when he worked, better than anything.

Then in the warm May days that were coming on, I used to lie in the balcony and look through the iron lace-work and put my paw out, and shake it about in the air. I could look down, too, and see the wheelbarrows with bright flowers on them, and the bare-headed women with lovely hair, and the tinkling cabs, and the drivers with their grey beaver hats.

Auntie May got a great deal better, well enough to go into society — French society. Mrs. Jay sometimes went with her, but not always, and one night—a night that will long live in my memory—Auntie May went to Madame Taine's literary party all alone.

At nine o'clock she came out of her room in her new evening cloak, and in a lovely pink dress all sequins and beads, and went down the stairs of the flat. I slipped out too, and went down on the train of her dress most of the way. She ought to have held it up, of course. She got into the cab the concierge had fetched, and having said goodbye to me upstairs, thought no more about me, and I was left sitting alone on the kerb.

The gutter was dirty, full of vegetables and

things thrown away, and even when they did tidy up, they only pushed the refuse under a grating. The dirty towel the men used to stop up the hole in the sewer with was lying near by—a stupid way of arranging it, I thought. The noise in the street was terrific. It was the first time I had stood there alone. The tinkly horse bells got on my nerves—horses all wear collars in Paris. One wonders they don't spoil their ruffs. Auntie May won't let any of her cats wear them, though for some reasons it would be most convenient, for one would always know where the cat was at a given moment. I longed to get in again, but the great big doors were shut. So sooner than sit still doing nothing, I moved a little way farther down the street, and gradually got on to what I imagined from descriptions must be the Big Boulevard. It was a great danger, but luckily it was dark. At the crossing there was a policeman with a stick that he tried to keep cabs back with as they do in London, so mother has told me, but the horses here just pushed it back rudely with their noses, and went on and nearly ran over people.

I got across, and on the other side there were numbers of places where They eat, and many people sitting outside at little tables munching

peanuts and drinking coffee out of glasses. They dropped pieces of sugar into them and gave them to their children, who all seemed to have leave to sit up and be out of doors in the night time. Rosamond and her sisters go to bed at eight, but then they are English children. Every moment I thought something was happening, people made such a noise. Every now and then men ran down the street calling out in dreadful fear; their harsh screams of terror frightened me, but I soon discovered, by an old gentleman near me giving one man a sou and quieting him, that these scraggy poor men were only selling their papers. In the middle of the road the stream of carriages and cabs rolled—rolled by till my poor head turned, and I didn't know when I should ever cross that river of carriages and get home. I knew, having crossed the street once, that I was bound to cross it again to get back, but there was not a cat in the whole region from whom I could ask the way.

I felt so lonely that I could have mewed aloud, but if I had that would have called attention to me, and I should have been arrested by one of the men in blue who held the *bâton* and minded the crossing. I rubbed myself against an old gentleman who was taking absinthe at the little table near

which I had placed myself. He looked down and only said, '*Tiens, un chat! Rentre, mon vieux,*' which translated means, 'Hold, a cat! Go home, old man!' which was precisely what I wanted to do, if only he would have put me safely over the crossing. He probably thought I belonged to the restaurant near where I was lurking.

At last the stream of carriages seemed to thin a little, and I took my courage between my teeth and made a wild dash to get across.

I did it. The garçon called out, '*Holà! Hé!*' and some other strange expressions of surprise, but I never minded. Keeping a stiff whisker, although I was mortally afraid, I walked down the long street that led southwards to my home in Rue de l'Echelle.

I knew the house by a piece of orange-peel lying in a particular place near the door that I had noticed when Auntie May had started three hours ago, and also by its own peculiar smell.

Every house has its special smell, over and above all the town smell, you know. The smell of Paris is quite different from the smell of London. It is a kind of fried-potatoes-and-garlic smell mixed together on a hot stove-dried air—nothing solid

about it, somehow. Auntie May says it is like sweet champagne, and just as heady.

I had plenty of time to think what the air of Paris was like, for the door stayed shut, and I stayed in the street with every prospect of doing it till morning. I could not ring the bell and say, '*Cordon, s'il vous plait.*' Then a thought struck me. Had Auntie May come in yet? How could I tell? I looked about to see if she had dropped anything—a pin, a flower, a hair-pin?

Nothing! Now, Auntie May was just the kind of person to drop something, and I began to hope that she had not come in yet. I waited. I could sneak in with her if I was mean, or make a clean breast of it and show myself. I didn't know which I would do. It depended on the sort of temper she was in. I can generally smell that.

After about an hour I heard a cab come down the street, going very quickly. Auntie May got out and paid the man and sent him away. Then she rang, very loudly and impatiently. I was sitting quietly beside her, meaning her to see me. I had decided to do it that way, but I said nothing. She noticed me at once, and spoke to me seriously:

'Oh, Loki, you villain, you darling, you naughty

little cat! How come you to be out? Mercy, when I think of what might have happened! A valuable cat, alone in Paris at midnight! I hope at least you have not been very far away from this door. This is a quiet sort of street, thank goodness. Quick! Say! Set my mind at rest!'

She shook me gently and I said, 'No,' but of course she only thought I mewed.

'Your sweet little mew quite disarms me. Oh, but you *have* given me a fright—an awful fright!'

I asked her if she had enjoyed herself?

'Why a fright, do you say? Anybody might have run off with you and made a boa of you. They wouldn't have made mincemeat, however, for you are a valuable cat, and they could see that at a glance, though you are English. They would have sold you into slavery. Well, people are honester than I thought! But perhaps nobody has passed this way? *Dis, mon chou!*' She had got so French that she called me a cabbage.

She squeezed me again, and I tried to remind her that nobody had answered that bell, and that her cloak was open, and it wasn't even a piece of whole fur, for it missed her neck out.

'Yes, you may well mew, for you are a really naughty little cat, and have wrung your poor

mistress's heart. Why don't they open that door? How long have we been standing here? Come under my cloak.'

'I wish you would fasten it,' I said.

'You are very conversational, Loki, to-night. I begin to think you have had adventures. I'll ring again. Conf—bother that concierge! Lazy creature! I'll ring the house down if he doesn't come soon. Well, well, we must possess our little souls in patience, Loki, you and I. Isn't it funny, standing out here in a strange town all alone at twelve o'clock at night, Loki? Awfully queer, and such a queer party I have been to. We drank punch in long glasses, and ate plum-cake and spoiled our gloves. When *will* this man answer the bell and open the door?'

She rang again. We both listened.

'I believe we shall have to make up a bed on the stones,' she said. 'I am beginning to get cross. Perhaps we can get the concierge dismissed to-morrow. Yes, we'll do that, anyhow.'

There was a man coming down the street in a rough black frieze cape and a black tie, whose ends floated out in the breeze. If ever I saw a Frenchman he was one, young too. Yet as he went by he said, very clearly and distinctly in English:

"I BELIEVE WE SHALL HAVE TO MAKE UP
A BED ON THE STONES," SHE SAID

'Poosh!'

And Auntie May did push, hard. That was it. The door was open all the time!

I believe the concierge had opened it when we first rang and gone to sleep again. But all I can say is we heard no click, and that is what Auntie May said to Mrs. Jay next morning.

'I didn't think that literary parties could be so exciting!' said Mrs. Jay.

Next morning a whole heap of letters came by the post. Auntie May read bits of them aloud to Mrs. Jay, and I heard them between my mouthfuls of bread and milk. There was one from Beatrice saying that she supposed Auntie May wasn't going to stay in Paris much longer, it must be getting so hot; she supposed she wouldn't mind a few little commissions, and out came a list as long as Auntie May's arm.

There was one from Mr. Fox, which I managed to get hold of and trailed all over the room, pretending it was a mouse, and paying it back for Mr. Fox's treatment of me. I like to be loved.

There was a long letter from Mrs. Dillon in South Africa about Admiral Togo.

'I sometimes think he is turning into a baby,' she wrote. 'He really is almost human, and expresses his every wish so

unmistakably that I am convinced he will actually talk some day. He is very well. His fur comes off, but the "vet" says that is inevitable here, and that it will come on again. He is a shocking bad sailor and hated the sea. Nothing would induce him to look at it through a porthole unless I held him in my arm and talked all the time to him. Then he got a little, nervously, interested. My maid bought a wicker basket-chair for him at Madeira, and he sat on it on deck, never making the slightest attempt to leave it. Below he had only one pleasure, a canary. Up to the very last he hoped that it would come into his mouth. He felt the heat of the tropics very much, and complained in a feeble way of being forced to travel in his chinchilla coat and cuffs. I showed him how to lie on the floor with his head on a book for coolness, so all the hot time he insisted on my making this arrangement for him; he could not somehow or other get it right for himself.

'Here at Rondebosch he is getting a little old-fashioned, having no other cats to play with except me and my maid. He goes walks with me, padding along on his short fat legs, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth till he is tired, when he lies down on his back and cries till I go and pick him up, and then have to carry him the rest of the way. I want my maid to buy him a "pram."'

I can't remember any more. Auntie May nearly cried with pleasure at getting this long letter from Mrs. Dillon. I wished Auntie May would take *me* walks. She never seemed to think of it, and I got into the habit of taking them for myself—on the roof.

This was stopped.

'May,' said Mrs. Jay, 'when I came in to-day I heard a mew, and your cat welcomed me into my own house from the roof, craning his silly little neck over the gutter, like the devils of Notre Dame. Do you think it safe? He isn't attached behind, like the gargoyles, you know.'

'Not at all safe,' said Auntie May, and, together with the hotness, this was one of the reasons for her deciding to go home.

About a fortnight after this my basket was brought out and filled with little bits of paper. I knew what this meant. I was not, however, put into it till the very last minute, two days later.

'Now, you travelled little cat,' said Auntie May, 'go into your "*sleeping*" and don't wail and distress me. It will soon be over, and you will see your mother again.'

I knew exactly how soon it would be over; it would last just as long as it had lasted to come here, and that was a whole day. I said nothing, and then began the goodbyes, which were just as distressing as my mewing would have been.

It is curious, but They do seem to have a

way of caring for each other far more than we do. Mrs. Jay and Auntie May knew each other no better than I and Mistigris, and I never even troubled to say goodbye to her, yet she was a nice little cat.

CHAPTER XV

THE BLACK COMMON CAT

We trained along, and it was very hot, and then we got into that weary old boat again, as I could tell by the fishy smell. I was put down by Auntie May's side in the cabin, and as soon as she had settled down a man came up to her and told her that she had a dog with her, and then when she denied it he said quite sharply:

'*Ouvrez!*' which means 'Open' without 'please.'

I drew myself up to my full height, and when the lid of the basket was lifted up was discovered in a sitting posture. I gave the insolent fellow A Look and lay down again to express my thorough contempt of him.

Bless me, there was a parrot in a cage, done up in an old red flannel petticoat in the most degrading way, that I heard them paying eighteenpence for!

It was about five o'clock when we arrived, and took a cab to go home. I was undone in the hall of No. 100 Egerton Gardens. I then jumped out gracefully and quietly, and stood, a little dazed, to tell the truth. Auntie May, having paid the cab, left the servants to get out the luggage, and taking me in her arms went straight to the studio. I knew she wanted badly to go and see mother and Fred, but restrained herself.

'Fathers before cats!' she said. 'What would Dad think if I did not go and dig him out first?'

On opening the studio door she gave a terrible jump, and dropped me. Mr. Graham was there all right, painting away with his back to her and his palette on his thumb; but what made her jump was the sight of mother sitting on the funny little bit of a chair which was all he would allow himself to sit on when he was tired, and Fred and Zobeide wallowing composedly in the wastepaper basket—Fred larger and more impudent than ever.

Worse than this, there was a large black cat with a white star on its breast, mumbling a fish's head in the middle of the floor, that didn't even have the grace to leave off when we came in.

'Oh, my dear, darling Dad!' cried Auntie May, rushing to him. 'How glad I am to see you;

and how are you, and why do I find you all—*silted* up with cats like this?'

Mr. Graham put down his palette and his mahl-stick, and Zobeide ran off with the latter, and Fred jumped on to the former, and he kissed Auntie May again and again, and answered her question rather slowly.

'Well, you see, my dear, you were a long time away, and Pet and Zobeide and Freddy—you were always so fond of them—I thought I could look after them all better if I kept them constantly under my eye. They are not the rose, but they were near it—and I was a bit lonely.'

'And so you had my menagerie in to remind you of me! Dear darling Dad, you couldn't have paid me a better compliment. But then, father, who is the black gentleman?'

'He is *my* cat!' said the old gentleman gravely, 'and you will please to love him for my sake. He is another story. One dark night I took him in—or rather he took *me* in, for he stayed here a week without my knowing it. He drank Pet's milk and ate my more easily digested paints, and never had the decency to get Pet to present him to me, though he was enjoying my hospitality. He is not well-favoured, as you see, but an interesting

beast—an adventurer, I fear. The other cats barely tolerate him!'

I should think not indeed! I had my tail twice as thick as usual already, and the black cat was staring hard at me, wishing he dared stiffen his too, but hardly sure enough of his position yet, in spite of Mr. Graham's friendly speech, to do so. The black cat then spoke to me personally:

'Now don't you be unkind, you new cat!' (My tail got stiffer, and I vowed I would never go from home again and leave a place for interlopers!) 'Your gracious lady mother and worthy brother have accepted me, and so why should not you? I only get cat's meat; the cook says it is good enough for me as I am not a thoroughbred, so I don't see why you should object to my presence here. I have shown the others that I am not prepared to be an annoyance. I never play with their rattley ball, or put my nose into their saucers of milk or what not, or sit in their places, as soon as I find out which they are.'

'That is quite true, Loki,' said mother. 'He is not at all pushing, and he is fairly good company. Fancy! He knows what it is to starve. It is as good as a story to listen to him. Such weird tales! I can hardly bring myself to believe

them, but then mine has been such a sheltered life!'

'What can any one as pretty as you, ma'am,' said the black cat (and then I saw how he had got round mother), 'know of the wickedness of the world and the cruelty of men? I am an example of that cruelty. I will tell you how——'

Fred interrupted him.

'He really isn't bad fun, Loki. He does to chase, and when he is caught hasn't the least objection to our biting his tail. It is rather nice to have a plain tail you needn't take care of, isn't it?'

'Oh, if you find him useful,' I said, 'I have nothing more to say.'

All this time May and her father were licking each other. He was pleased to see *her* back. *My* mother seemed to have forgotten *me*! She met me merely with politeness, as she might a stranger. It had all fallen out exactly as she had predicted. I was nothing to her now—nothing special, I mean. Later on in the day she gave me a bat with her paw, the first of many. I soon got used to it, and hit back.

Mr. Graham told Auntie May that Mr. Fox had been three times to ask after her. I don't think from the way he spoke that Mr. Fox had

told him about his visit to Paris, for he seemed to be under the impression that I had been sent on to her from the cattery at Kew by parcels delivery, and, as far as I know, May did not undeceive him. Mr. Fox had gone up to Shortleas, his shooting near Beatrice's house, and Mr. Graham said he was quite rich.

Auntie May said, 'How do you know that, Daddy?'

'Because he told me so, my dear.'

All Auntie May said was, 'Oh!' but as she went out of the room she added, 'It is a pity he hates cats so, isn't it?'

The black cat's name was Charlie, but Auntie May never knew that, and she christened him Blackavice, because he had a black face. He was a really comfortable old thing, and the night after I came back we all listened to him, sitting on different high things in the room. We cats never like to be crowded up together unless we are sleeping, and then we prefer it because of the warmth.

He was only nine, and he had had a strange and varied life. He told us all in snippets, some things one evening and some another, and some things twice over. We never minded that, but listened to his yarns with the greatest attention. We liked

him fairly well, but not well enough to lick him. One never knew where he had been, and there is a dustbin full of potato peelings and other things to every house in the square.

He had lived once, he said, in a family in London where the master kept him to catch mice, and the cook to put thefts on. He never knew what he hadn't done. When he saw a joint or a fish come in, handed over at the backdoor by the fishmonger or the butcher's boy, he used to say sadly to himself, 'Now, shall I be supposed to steal that?' And generally the cook's mother came in the afternoon of that day, and, sure enough, she got one of those soles or the end of that joint, and the mistress was told next morning, 'Ma'am, that awful Charlie again!' He tried to manage to be out of the way while the mistress was ordering dinner, because after saying this sort of thing the cook used to look round for him and broom him out to show how cross she was with him, and how she abhorred his crime. It was a most insecure life. Then once or twice he said he thought that he might as well have the good of the fish or meat he was accused of stealing, and he really did take it; but the cook was too sharp for him, and gave him a whipping for stealing the portion of her poor old

mother. That didn't pay, and only was the means of his getting two whippings instead of one.

The cook hardly fed him at all, but expected him to cater for himself out of the mice that were living behind the boards, and who came out at night and played about. The supply of mice varied very much, and he said that, when mice were plentiful, he used to let them go so as to save them for another dinner later on; then if mice were scarce he got so weak he couldn't catch them. He often thought it wasn't good enough, and that he would like to make a change. He visited every house in the square in which he lived, in turn, hoping that they would see fit to keep him, as he was a black cat, and a black cat taking up its abode with you is accounted lucky. But no, they all broomed him out, and one tall cook hot-watered him out, and that hurt. So he stayed on with Mrs. Murch and was bullied all the time, and had no pleasure in life, except on warm sunny days sitting in the square garden pretending that there was no necessity to fag after birds. He used to envy the cats who didn't have need to pretend, but were so well fed that all they need do was to look lazily after the birds flying past, and gibber at them, or cats like us who are positively forbidden

to go after birds because it is cruel. The first time the family went away for the summer and left him, he couldn't make head or tail of it, he said. But other cats told him he might think himself lucky They had not locked him in, the way They do sometimes, and then the policeman has to get them out if he is kind and has a mind to. Charlie had the run of the garden and the birds, but he missed the 'drain' of milk the cook gave him when she was in a good humour, and he soon got so weak and flabby that he could not catch a bird, and they used to sit in the branches and mock at him—the sparrows, that is.

He made up his mind that he would not go through with it another year, and about July he began to make love to the cook's mother, taking her a mackerel or so that he had stolen on purpose for her and laying it at her feet. The cook's mother was pleased with him, and, as he had calculated, offered to borrow him for a month and see what he could do with the rats down at her place, down at Limehouse Pier, or something like that, and he said we would hardly believe it, but he got far more to eat while he was there than at home. The poor are much more lavish than the rich, and live so much better. And he saw life! 'My

word!' he would say, licking his whiskers, which were fine and large, and his only beauty. He said they were of immense use to him in showing what sized gaps he could get through, for if his whiskers were at all incommoded, he at once knew that the hole or gap was too small for the thickest part of him. Such tight places he had been in. He would lift up his head and yawn and say:

'The things I have seen, ma'am, you would not believe!'

Then mother would kindly ask him to spare our youth, and not tell us all the dreadful things that he had seen and heard in the slums, for it would not have been nice. He might tell her when they were alone, but as they seldom were alone I don't think he ever got the chance, though he was dying to shock her, because she was so shockable.

And then the old woman died, and a rent-collecting lady, who had been kind to her when she couldn't pay her rent and paid it for her herself, took Charlie away with her when all the sticks were sold—there was only a table and a chair, as far as I can remember, when she had pawned everything—and gave him to a little boy who was her nephew. It happened to be a little boy in Egerton Gardens where we lived. Funny,

how small the world is! That boy was rough and played experiments with him, and catapulted him, and tied things to him, and harnessed him, and put him to bed in his sister's doll's nightgowns in the day-time. That was disagreeable, Charlie said, but he never bit him, and he was glad afterwards, for the little boy got ill.

He was put to bed, and he came out all in red spots, and he simply yelled for his black cat. The nurse took Charlie up and put him on the bed, and the little boy grabbed him and held him very uncomfortably for a long time till he got tired. He was a very clever little boy, and when his mother said to him, 'But, Teddy, you will give the poor cat your measles,' he answered, 'He can be *defected* same as me, can't he?'

'They don't disinfect *you*, my boy, only your clothes,' the mother said. 'And that is so that your clothes may not give it to any one else.'

'Then can Charlie carry a measle away on his fur?' the little boy asked, very much frightened, and began to cry because he supposed that Charlie ought to be taken away from him. They were much upset at the idea, and the nurse said in a low voice:

'We can arrange all that, ma'am; don't thwart

him, whatever you do!' And so Charlie was left, but from that moment he had an uncomfortable feeling that the nurse meant to kill him when he had done his work of amusing Teddy. So when Teddy was going to get better he watched to see the sickroom door open, and ran away and came in here.

That was the first time mother had heard of the reasons that had induced him to leave his home, and she was very serious.

'I don't believe that *we* are liable to measles,' she said thoughtfully. 'But you may give it to Auntie May.'

'She never takes me on her lap,' said the black cat sadly. 'I ought not to repine, for it is safer for her, and she is a nice lady. I hunger for a word of affection sometimes, though.'

'The question is, not your need of affection,' said mother severely, 'but the danger of Auntie May's getting measles. As your fur—excuse me—is not very long, perhaps you cannot carry infection like, for instance, Freddy here. We won't worry.'

I looked every day after that to see if Auntie May was coming out in red spots like little Teddy, but there was not a single measle that I could see.

THAT BOY WAS ROUGH AND
PLAYED EXPERIMENTS WITH HIM.

It was, however, a nasty scare, and mother said Charlie was little better than an adventurer, and ought not to have come in like that without any references at all.

He was a battered old thing, too; very shabby and ailing, and seemed to have been very much knocked about in general. The skin of both his ears showed bare and furless where another cat had taken hold of him. His long mean tail was broken off sharp at the end, where it had been caught in a trap, out hunting for rabbits on the sly. And he had had an awful adventure once in France, where he had been taken by some English people and left on the farm which they hired for the summer. There some French child had had the bright idea of putting him on a smart collar of twisted rushes plaited up into a string. The child made it a little too big, not big enough for him to be able to get it off, but big enough for him to get his paw through and nearly his whole front-leg. He said he thought himself very clever to do this, but he bitterly regretted it, for he could not get the leg back and had to walk on three. Nobody on the French farm noticed it, and as it was they never fed him. French people never do feed dogs hardly, and cats never. They are not nice to

animals. He says he never saw a dog or cat properly covered with flesh the whole time he was there; they were all wretched scrags. Well, the trouble with poor Charlie was that he couldn't catch any mice or birds to speak of, and he was nearly starving. He thought that he grew rather light-headed, for one day, in his extreme misery, he ran away into the woods and made up his mind to die. The place where his leg was pressing on his neck got sore—the collar rubbed it, I suppose—and he couldn't reach up to lick it, and so the paw got stuck to his body and began to fester, and caused him great pain.

After about a week of starvation he happened to see a lady bathing in the river, who, when she had come out and dried herself, pulled a little bread and meat out of a napkin, and ate something and drank something on the edge of the stream. He went up to her, and she noticed him and called him, but he was too wild and shy to dare to go near her. He was ashamed of himself and the figure he cut.

However, she left half her luncheon and rolled it out on the grass for him, and he came down from a sort of perch he had in a tree and ate it.

Next day the lady came and bathed again, and

again he did not dare to go near her, although she again left the remains of her luncheon for him. This went on for about a week. She at last brought another lady with her, and the other lady said she was sure that there was something wrong with that black cat, if only he would come near enough for them to see. She hinted that perhaps if she could find out the damage she might be able to do something for him. He heard, still he dared not go near them, for he had a stupid notion that if they once got hold of him they might tie up his other leg. You see, since a mere child had done such a cruel thing to him he distrusted everybody. The other lady said nothing, but one day when he had ventured a little nearer to her than usual, she was very quick and threw a large napkin all over him. He got all mixed up in it, not being as nimble as he would have liked to be, with his arm tied up, and thus he found himself a prisoner.

And glad he was that he had fallen into her hands, although, indeed, at first, he gave himself up for lost. The lady had a pair of scissors hanging to her girdle, and she held him firmly by the scruff of the neck while her companion gripped him by the hind legs to prevent his scratching her, which in his excitement and nervousness he would have

been sure to do, and the band of rushes was cut and thrown aside. Then he said their exclamations completely reassured him and he ceased to struggle.

'Oh, poor creature! His paw has grown right on to his neck! What an awful sore! I can hardly bear to look at it!'

They *did* look at it, however, and washed it with fresh water from the stream, and cut all the matted bobbedy hair away from the part; still he could not put his paw to the ground. He was quite good and patient, and he tried to show gratitude in his eyes.

'He is a rare ugly beast!' one of them said. 'I feel like St. Vincent de Paul! Do you think he would go in the luncheon basket, and could we make him a bed of rushes and grass in it and take him home?'

The other one objected, but only faintly, and the long and the short of it was they carried him home to the house which they rented on a farm, and looked after him most kindly, washing his sore with warm water every day, and smearing it with nice clean ointment. That was not all. They took him to England and put him in a cat's home, paying eighteenpence a week for him. From

there some one bought him — the mistress of Mrs. Murch. That brings him down to the time when we first knew him; and indeed, when I think of the good stories he had to tell, I am sorry he ever left us.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLACK CAT BRINGS MEASLES

A WEEK after that Auntie May did not come down to breakfast, and Mary looked fussy and important as if something had happened, and a certain great carriage came and stood at our door, which mother said was a doctor's carriage. We heard Mary and the cook talking about it.

'It's measles, sure enough,' said Mary. 'Mrs. Curtis's little boy, t'other side of the square, died of it last week. It is all over. You and me 'll go next, cook, sure as eggs is eggs.'

'Eggs is often egg powder,' said the cook severely. 'You just sit still and don't go to meet misfortune half way. More work and less talk, I say.'

We told the black cat that he was little better than a murderer, bringing measles in and giving them to our dear Auntie May, and we made him

so uncomfortable that he left. I don't suppose he would starve or anything, for he had collected enough strength with us to last him through the winter, and make him fit to catch as many birds as he could eat. Besides, I don't think he was going to live long anyhow. To my certain knowledge he had licked up a whole tube of madder-lake, and swallowed the cork of a bottle of quick-drying copal.

Mary was not a good cat-maid, though she had acquired what Auntie May called the cat-tread. She had learned to walk carefully, shovelling her feet along the floor so as to avoid treading on kittens. Of course, now that we were older, we oozed away ourselves, and were too proud to call out if a paw got caught, or so on.

Then an awful thing happened, and while Auntie May was ill too. Perhaps if Auntie May hadn't been ill it would never have happened. Zobeide went and lost herself.

We all went out now and then, though it wasn't approved of unless Auntie May took us herself, and that was all right; it was going alone that was wrong. Whenever we were missed there was a fine hue and cry, and Auntie May used to run out without her boots, or her hat, or her jacket,

and hunt the garden. When she had done this in vain, she used to go out in the street and walk all round the fronts of the houses to see if she could see a bit of grey cat sticking out anywhere. She got *me* that way once. I was sitting on the outside wall looking inwards and my tail hung down into the street. She came along and took hold, and wow! but I had to come down backwards along with it! I felt as if it were being pulled out by the roots, and that all resistance was vain and painful as well. So I was amenable to persuasion, if you can call anything so rough as that persuasion.

There was no Auntie May to fetch Zobeide in. She wasn't even told lest it sent up her temperature. Besides, I fancied some one had stolen Zobeide, and I remembered that Auntie May once said that one merit of having valuable cats was that if they got lost or were stolen it wasn't to do them harm; that the thief would cherish every hair of the coat of a Blue Persian, and that it was only a question of change of residence and missing the departed, without the agony of imagining all sorts of horrid fates that might have befallen them. She said she could never sleep at night if she had to think of the possibility of our coming upon the streets and being carried off to be

vivisected. Perhaps poor Charlie got vivisected! Oh dear!

Mother and I and Fred did not break our hearts or care half so much about Zobeide as poor Mr. Graham did. He took an immense lot of trouble, and went to the police station about her, and when he came home he wrote on a great piece of paper, in copy-book hand:

LOST

Valuable Persian Cat

On the Thirty-first instant from

No. 100 Egerton Gardens.

Whoever will bring the same back to owner will receive the sum of Five Pounds.

This he had printed, and mother says she heard that a copy was stuck in the window of every shop in the district. Of course that curious Mary had to go out and spy them all out and come home and tell cook.

We were a great deal in the kitchen at this period, and liked it in a way. It was warmer than anywhere else in the house, and there were plenty of odd things good to eat, though Auntie May strictly forbade Mary or cook to feed us between

meals. Our meals were always arranged beforehand. For instance, Fred could not eat fish—it always made him sick. He also liked a thing better if he had stolen it. When he was ill and wouldn't eat his bread and milk they put it on the china-table to tempt him, and it did. He would eat all quickly, thinking he would get shooed off every other minute. Mother could not bear lentils; she had never been brought up to them, she said. Now I loved them, also cod-liver-oil biscuits. None of us could stand salt meat or veal, but game, of course, was heaven. We had different ways with the bones. I like to split mine up and get the juice that is inside the bone out and suck it. Mother thought it would hurt our teeth, and she only picked hers. As she was getting a little old, she had raw meat twice a week to strengthen her, and in the winter Auntie May always gave her cod-liver-oil. What she really liked best was burnt currants out of a cake. She used to sit at Auntie May's elbow and pick them out of her mouth. I have a weakness for anchovy sandwiches, and Auntie May always gratifies it.

So you see we are rather a nuisance with our various likes and dislikes; but I am bound to say cook and Mary were very good while Auntie

May's illness lasted, and did not alter the menu in the least. The measles lasted an age. I cannot count time, so I don't know, but I remember very clearly the first day when Auntie May was 'safe' —able to see us, I mean. She had been away to the seaside before that time, and I heard Mary say that when she came back she might go anywhere and see who she liked.

Mary tied bows of ribbon on all our necks against her home-coming; she thought Auntie May wouldn't mind for once, and cook and she thought that she didn't really ever keep us smart enough.

I tried not to get mine worked round to my chin so as to oblige Mary; but Fred got his mixed up with sardine-oil about an hour before she came, and had to have it taken off.

We were all in her study when she came in, and I was determined she should not complain of the coldness of our welcome this time, so we all rushed at her.

'Mercy! What a lot of little catapults!' said she. The day was cold, for it was nearly autumn, and she threw off her coat, not caring how dreadfully distracting it was to Freddy. He bore it well, though, and left the most fascinating bobble untouched lest she should feel neglected.

'Where is Zobeide?' she said suddenly. 'Mary! Mary!' for Mary had bolted.

'I simply cannot rest till I find Zobeide,' she muttered, going to cupboard doors and opening them. 'The darling! Where is she, Mary? Mary!'

It is always the way. She had got *us*, but people always want the one they haven't got, and then take not the slightest interest in the ones that have been good and stayed at home; for, of course, as every one knew, Zobeide was up to no good when she got herself stolen. Auntie May got quite mad with anxiety, and opened the door of her room and met Mary on the threshold.

'Mary, please, where is Zobeide?'

'Lost, Miss. Mr. Fox have called.'

Auntie May banged the door and went down to see Mr. Fox. I suppose Mary told her about Zobeide on the way downstairs, that is if she cared any more to listen. People are so funny!

CHAPTER XVII

A WEDDING IN THE HOUSE

It was the beginning of the end.

Mr. Fox's sister sent word she wanted to buy a cat, either me or Fred. Auntie May told us when she came upstairs that evening after Mr. Fox had gone. (He had stayed two whole hours.) She said:

'I think I shall sell Fred, because only last night he emptied my wastepaper basket, mixed my unanswered letters with the thrown-away ones, and added a paper of tin tacks and a box of boracic-acid powder to the mess. Fred is too good to live. I hear Mr. Fox's sister is very severe with the animals about her place, so, Freddy, you will be heavily corrected for your misdemeanours. Yes, you are cut out for a country cat! Your little manners are shocking. Freddy Orson! You ought to be called Orson.'

Freddy didn't quite understand that he was being disapproved of, but he got on her knee in a friendly way and curled round and rubbed his long tooth against the left wing of her nose, causing her thereby great discomfort. He meant well, but it all went to prove what she said, that his manners were not refined. Mother and I thought he had better go, but indeed we were not consulted. He went in a basket. Mother didn't say goodbye to him formally. I don't think she noticed.

Then Rosamond came down to stay in Egerton Gardens, and I got at the truth of the situation from her. She was now sixteen, and had grown quite ugly. Children, they say, grow in and out. Well, she was 'out' now. She was a very sensible girl, though.

'I believe Mr. Fox is very fond of you, Auntie May,' she said one day, 'and would like to marry you, but he simply can't get at you for your cats.'

'Oh, that is what you think, do you?' said Auntie May, not taking much notice of her, but going on with what she was doing very hard.

'Yes, and he is trying to exterminate them one by one,' said Rosamond. 'You see he has got rid

of Freddy, and very soon he will be making you an offer for Loki. As for dear old Petronilla, anybody can see that he won't have to wait long for her, she is on her last legs. Oh, Auntie dear, say you will marry him when Petronilla dies, and then *see* if he doesn't manage to give her poison.'

'Rosamond, what an odious suggestion! Mr. Fox is very nice—much too nice to do that—and besides, as I said to him, "Love me, love my cats."'

'Ah, so you have spoken to him about it?' gibed the horrid little girl. 'Now you *have* given yourself away. Well, what does Mr. Fox say? Does he love you enough to wait for Petronilla's death?'

'Don't talk nonsense, child. I am not going to marry Mr. Fox at all, whether Pet were to die to-morrow or live to be a hundred, as I am sure I hope she will, poor lamb! As for Mr. Fox, our tastes are too absolutely dissimilar for anything of that kind to be possible.'

'Quite possible, *I* think, if only the cat difficulty could be got over,' said that naughty Rosamond. 'I believe you two adore each other! And aren't you grateful to him for bringing your horrid cat—horrid from his point of view I mean—across to

Paris for you? I think it was angelic, like a knight of old, performing terribly difficult tasks to please his lady.'

'Will you hold your silly little tongue? Go and do your health exercises!'

That was the way she always got rid of Rosamond, by some order or another. You see Rosamond, though she was sixteen, still had to obey. Yet though Auntie May was older than Rosamond, that child could turn her round her little finger.

Luckily mother was not in the room when Rosamond said those nasty things about her age. But I thought over them deeply. It was true mother had grown very thin and weak lately; several times I have heard Mary say when lifting her up:

'Why, she don't weigh no more than a feather!'

Her eyes were so big and bright they seemed to swallow up her whole face. I wondered how long Mr. Fox thought he would have to wait? I wondered how long we cats usually live, but, of course, I did not like to ask mother for fear of making her think about death. I remember her once telling me that when her time came to die she would not like anybody to be there. She

would try to get away into a corner somewhere, and not be found till all was over.

That is cat's way all over the world, and I believe the way of dogs too.

I wonder if that was the way that Admiral Togo died?

One morning Auntie May got a letter from Mrs. Dillon. She read it aloud to Rosamond as long as she could without crying, and then Rosamond took it by her permission and read it too aloud till *she* cried. But this way I got it all.

RONDEBOSCH, *February* 12, 18—.

MY DEAR MAY—I have had a great sorrow. Togo is dead. My maid and I fought for his life so hard that I thought he *must* live. I could have borne it better if I could have felt that it was *really* inevitable—but the shocking ignorance we have had to contend with has been incredible. From the first moment of our seeing anything wrong we sought in every possible direction for help. They always said it was malaria, and that I was to nurse him up and feed him as his only chance. When at last I got hold of a vet who *did* know his business, he said the poor little thing was dying of pleurisy—temperature a hundred and five! He said it was too late for tapping, and he gave him a little whiff of chloroform which sent him quietly to his last sleep. I could not bear that he should go through any more doubtful cruel remedies. If my maid had lost an only child she could not have felt it more, after having nursed that cat night and day for so long. It has made me quite ill. I do

always love things so passionately, and this was more than a pet. He was with me constantly, and I knew he was turning into a baby! Over and over again I have said, 'He is *too* good, he will never live to grow up!' He was like Hans Andersen's Mermaid, he was getting a soul, and indeed he won it at last, in the only way possible, through love and well-borne pain. The last fortnight he was almost human, his eyes had lost the mere animal stare, and looked up constantly into ours for love and help, which we could not give, alas! He lay most of the time in my arms or in my maid's, and had grown so thin we had to carry him about in a shawl. He lost two and a half pounds in three weeks——

It was here that Rosamond broke down and the letter was put away. Auntie May settled to give Mrs. Dillon another kitten, a brother of Togo's, so perhaps he might be as nice.

But the new family of kittens were rather wretched-looking little things, and I sniffed over them a great deal, till mother told me that I myself had looked neither better nor worse than they did. I enjoyed helping to mind them, and often I was trusted to get into the basket and keep them warm while mother stretched her legs. A day or two after they were born mother said:

'I shall never have any more, so I mean to do my duty by these!' I think that meant she fancied she was going to die soon, and I have no

doubt Auntie May knew it too, and told Mr. Fox so.

Then Beatrice came to stay in London with us for a week, and she spoke to Auntie May very severely about Mr. Fox.

'May, you are a fool,' she said. 'I am fond of animals myself, but I shouldn't let them interfere with things of real importance.'

'It is unfortunate,' said Auntie May in a cold, horrid tone, 'that I should happen to fall in love with the only man I know who cannot be in the same room with a cat. It is too absurd. But what can I do?'

'Do, silly girl? Sell all this lot of kittens before you have time to get fond of them; leave Petronilla with Dad, and they can be the prop of each other's declining years—that is Dad's phrase, not mine, he said it to me only this morning—and I—yes, I will have Loki, and Tom shall take up every blessed trap on the place—I'll make him. There, will that suit you?'

'But I have got so used to having cats about. Must I be condemned to live without a cat for all the rest of my life?'

'May, I have no patience with you. You must give up something.'

'Why can't *he* give up something, instead of me?'

'You may be quite sure he does give up something—heaps of things—to please you. He is willing to give up smoking——'

'Yes, it makes me sick. But why should any one mind cats? It is absurd that such a silly prejudice as that can't be got over.'

'Well really, if cats make *him*, and smoking makes *you* sick, I consider it a very fair exchange. I say, look at Loki, now, I should take that kitten away from him if I were you, he is licking it to a pulp.'

Auntie May got up and took the kitten away from me. I had worked very hard at it, and had made it quite wet. I thought I had done well. I know I took pains. I had got my paws round its neck to steady it, and it said nothing. I must say it looked rather shrunken and flattened out thin when they took it away, but I believe Beatrice only mentioned it, and objected to what I was doing to it, to change the conversation. She probably thought she had been going on at May too long.

All this time I had never seen the blessed Mr. Fox who was upsetting us all so. I was kept

carefully out of his way. Consequently I didn't see much of my mistress.

But one day I was in the studio under a console, behind the dummy, behind Rosamond's portrait, in fact a good way off, and with a good many artistic smells between me and Mr. Fox, who had come to see Auntie May, and had been shown in there as the drawing-room was untidy and having something done to it, and Mr. Graham was out varnishing at the Royal Academy. Auntie May knew she had shut the door of her study, and considered that I therefore could not possibly be anywhere but safe upstairs. I wasn't in when she shut it, however, you see. I did not show myself to them, tactfully, but tried to get out, following the skirting board all the way to the door. There were heaps of things propped up against the walls, and it was slow work. Besides, Mr. Fox for once did not seem at all affected by my presence.

I had only got half round the room when I heard Auntie May say:

'Mr. Fox—' she hesitated a little, 'it might interest you perhaps to know that I have decided to let Beatrice take Loki, while Pet stays behind with Dad!'

Poor Mr. Fox turned bright red, not pale as he generally does in the presence of a cat, and said:

'*Behind*—did you say?'

'Behind me—that is, if you take *me* away——'

When Auntie May said that, in a little voice, it seemed to please Mr. Fox very much, though it was a simple enough thing to say. They sat down on a sofa together and talked, and I thought it a good opportunity to make finally for the door.

Unfortunately one of the pictures against the wall was stood up too straight, and when I came out from behind it it fell down with a clatter. Auntie May got up and came to where I was, and when she saw me she gave a little jump, and put her finger to her mouth and went back to Mr. Fox.

'Henry,' she said, 'how do you feel?'

'I never felt better in my life, dear,' he answered. 'Since you gave me your promise the whole air of the world seems changed. I could move mountains, I feel so fit——'

'Yet the air of the studio,' she said, 'is not particularly pure. The smell of paint rags, and varnishes, and stale tobacco, and *cats*——'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that my beloved Loki has been here in the room with you for the last half-hour, and yet

you have been praising the purity of the air and exulting in your "fitness." Oh, Henry, perhaps you have got over it?—say you have! Then I shall be quite happy!'

'Perhaps I have,' said he. 'You, by your presence, are able to dispel evil influences—temporarily, at any rate. We will try.'

'No, Loki goes to Beatrice's all the same,' she said sadly, and put me gently out of the door.

I myself think it was the smell of the turpentines and varnishes, and so on, that she had spoken of that made Mr. Fox not notice me, and I foresaw that I should not see much more of my mistress in the time to come.

She married Mr. Fox in less than a month's time, and I have never seen her cry so much in her life as on her wedding day when she kissed mother and me and bade us goodbye. She kissed us twice, once before she went to the church, and we got tangled up in her veil, and the smell of orange blossoms (real, in her hair, that Mrs. Jay sent from Paris) nearly made us ill, but we were proud to be so loved, and wished we could follow her to the altar.

Beatrice, in dove-coloured taffeta, to show that she was going to love us dearly, and didn't think

any frock too good for us, held us in her arms too, and gave us a chance of crushing her trimmings, but she didn't care, for it made Auntie May happy and sent her down with a smile on her face. Rosamond, Amerye, and Kitty were her bridesmaids, and very nice they looked, but I didn't take much notice of them, knowing that I was going to spend the rest of my life with them in Yorkshire. Tom met me on the staircase, just as I was stealing down to see some of the fun.

'Hollo, little beggar!' he said. 'Where are you off to so fast? Don't you go near the bridegroom for your life, he is shaky enough already. Back to barracks, back to barracks, young man!' and he took me by the scruff of my neck and walked me upstairs to the study again. So I never had another sight of Auntie May's husband, then or afterwards.

Auntie May stays with Beatrice sometimes without him, but not for long. They live in the summer at Shortleas. Of course she often comes over for the day. When he comes with her I am carefully kept out of the way, and, indeed, I fall in with their plans cheerfully, and arrange to spend a good deal of time in the garden and employ myself as well as I can, for I am becoming quite an outside cat now, and catch birds and mice. One's sentiment becomes

blunted with age, I find. I don't suffer over my hunting proclivities as I used to do. Tom calls me the sporting cat, and wouldn't shoot me for the world, I am too useful. Beatrice is proud of me and my ruff, and shows me to visitors when she can get me in in time. I always come when she calls me, unless I am in the middle of a bird, and then I bring it along to show her why I dawdled. She always screams and hides her face, and says:

'Oh, take it away, Loki, don't show it *me*! I suppose you *must*, but I needn't know it!'

All the same, I know she thinks me smart to have caught it, and I never spare her a bird.

Auntie May's baby has two nurses to itself. They come and stay here what Beatrice calls *ad lib*, while Auntie May and Mr. Fox are visiting on the 'continong,' as the head nurse says. Of course Beatrice is very glad to have them. The under nurse is a child, not much bigger than Rosamond, and far more meddlesome than a child. This is the sort of thing she does.

Since I have been here I have learned that there are such things as swallows—fidgety birds, that winter abroad like Auntie May and Mr. Fox, and that I would as soon think of eating as I would of eating the baby. I feel a sort of relationship, too,

as if swallows were the 'smoke-blues' among birds; their fur is the kind of blue we are, only darker, and they are not at all a common kind of bird.

One summer a swallow built its nest in a tool-house not far off the tree where the nurse and baby and Lotty used to take the pram and sit all the afternoon. Lotty had not much to do; the nurse would hardly trust her with baby, so she played about and pried into other people's affairs. She discovered the swallow's nest high up under the eaves, where nothing except a Lotty could possibly reach it. She poked away at it with a stick, and pushed it down.

There *was* a scene! Rosamond was so cross! When she was told, she ran straight into the shed where Lotty told her all the birds were lying about on the ground. She first bade the head nurse hold me and hide my face under her dress, lest I should see her go in and learn where the birds were. As if I did not know, and as if I should touch them! The nurse put me into the pram beside the baby and rocked us both; and I liked that, and lay quite still and waited for Rosamond to come back out of the tool-house and tell us all about it. She soon came back and sat down beside nurse and Tom, who had come out too. Lotty sneaked away crying.

'That little fool!' said Rosamond. 'What did she want to go into the tool-shed for? One of the birds is not to be found, but I have picked up the nest and two of the nestlings, and put them back and jammed the remnants of the nest against the wall somehow. Will they live? The only thing is that they would have been ready to fly in a day or two. Perhaps the mother will come back and feed them? We must put a saucer of bread and milk there. And keep Loki away. You must promise faithfully not to go near the place to see, nurse. As for Lotty, she will never look at a swallow again, I should hope. Ignorant meddling little thing!'

All the rest of that afternoon did I sit quietly beside the head nurse, with my eye fixed on that shed. By and by I counted as many as ten swallows flying in and out continually—making a great fuss, in fact. I promised myself to go there and see for myself after dark.

But I was saved from committing a very vile and foolish action. Of course the sight of a cat, however harmless, would have driven away the relations of the little swallows for ever! About a couple of hours later, however, Rosamond went into the shed, and told Beatrice what she had seen.

'They have found the other swallow. There are three in the nest. I looked. They must have heaved it up off the ground somehow on their broad flat backs. Oh how I wish I had seen them do it! And it looks—I can't actually swear it—as if some of the bread and milk had gone! Wonderful creatures! Now in a day or two the nestlings will probably fly away, and I shall be able to forgive Lotty!'

Sure enough, a few days after this the nest was empty. There was no other cat about the place but me, and I had not been near the shed, but had relied solely for information on what I heard Rosamond tell Beatrice. The nurse had, I am sorry to say, so little faith in human nature that she believed to the last that I had eaten them all, but Beatrice and Rosamond knew that I had not; they would have seen it in my eyes if I had, so they said.

I am called Rosamond's cat. It is Rosamond that I sit on the mat for when she is out and run to when she comes home. I am very fond of Rosamond, and I think her very good. I suppose that is the reason her mother is so fond of her. That is the one thing I can never understand. I never saw Beatrice 'bat' Rosamond as my mother

'batted' me. Instead, I see Rosamond, at sixteen, get on to her mother's knee and sit there. Beatrice evidently knows quite well that Rosamond is her child. I often wonder if Rosamond went away for a long while, whether Beatrice would not forget her, as mother forgot me while I was in Paris?

Perhaps if they do decide to send her to Paris to be 'finished,' which is talked of, when she comes back they will alter their ways, and behave like ordinary people. Rosamond doesn't go to school, but has a new governess every three months or so, so it shows that they do take pains with her.

I am not sure that I am not the reason they keep her at home. She could not look after me if she were away at school, and as it is, she is everything to me. Of course I never can love any one as much as Auntie May; even now when I see her I can't mew for happiness. I just lie in her lap and say nothing for hours, and she says to Beatrice:

'I *wonder* if Loki really remembers me?'

Oh, I am remembering all the time, only I can't say it! Why, there is an old fur jacket of hers that she left here once for Rosamond that I simply never let Rosamond have. I lay on it and covered it with grey hairs, that won't brush off, thank

goodness! So that in the end Beatrice has given up all idea of taking it away from me, and it is called Loki's coat, not Rosamond's.

Rosamond sometimes looks at me sitting on it, and pretends to shriek, and says:

'I should be so warm this winter if Loki hadn't taken my nice winter coat for himself!'

I blink at her, and stretch out my paw, for I know it is all fun. What is Auntie May's smell, that is all over that dear coat, to Rosamond, compared with what it is to me? The oddest thing of all is that they none of Them seem to imagine how awfully fond I am of Auntie May, and how I hate Mr. Fox for taking my mistress away from me!

One of these days at breakfast time there came a letter from Auntie May, and they told me my mother was dead. Kitty tied a bit of black ribbon round my paw. They don't understand. I kept it on till dinner-time to please the child.

A month later some one told me that Auntie May had found Zobeide again at a cat-show at the Crystal Palace—or at least a cat that she was sure *was* Zobeide from some secret signs she knew. She took a prize, anyway. I gather that Auntie May was not able to make good her claim on the cat.

Fancy, nearly two years afterwards! Why, I am very much altered since the day I was here first, and whacked Great Uncle Tomyris in the looking-glass in Beatrice's room. I saw him again the other day. He looks older too, if a ghost *can* look older. I am not afraid of him any more. I am bored by him, and don't care to raise so much as a paw to him.

I am really a very happy cat. I never worry. I eat brown bread. The only bad thing that *could* happen to me, I think, would be that my new mistress, Rosamond Gilmour, should go and choose a Mr. Fox for herself, and then I should be thrown on the world again.

Of course, she *may* marry, but I believe in that case she would take me with her, and luckily the tribe of Foxes is not common.

THE END

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SHE MARRIED MR. FOX
IN LESS THAN A MONTH.

FEB 7 - 1951